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**MOSES
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PLAYBOY

Marvel Star
CHLOE
BENNET

Reflects on
Seven Years of
'S.H.I.E.L.D.'



The woman behind Daisy “Skye/Quake” Johnson talks diversity, time travel and her emotional last day on set

BY GIL MACIAS

All good things must come to an end—including, to the dismay of countless of Marvel fans, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, whose final season premieres this week on ABC.

Developed and co-created by Joss Whedon (*The Avengers*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*), the series is produced by Marvel Television and ABC Studios as a small-screen outpost of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It explores the inner workings of the S.H.I.E.L.D. organization (Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division) and has introduced us to new agents such as Melinda May, played by Ming-Na Wen, and the enigmatic Daisy “Skye/Quake” Johnson, played by rising star Chloe Bennet.

From her mysterious origins to her many

tragic love story lines, Daisy has become a standout character and fan favorite. (Don’t worry, Fitz and Simmons; we love you too.) Her transformation from the awkward rookie agent Skye to the formidable Inhuman known as Quake has been a rewarding journey—for loyal viewers of the show and for Bennet herself.

Prior to *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, Bennet had a brief stint as a pop star in China. (Look up the video for her “Uh Oh” single under her former name, Chloe Wang; it’s a hoot.) She would later shift her focus to acting and land a co-host gig on TeenNick’s *The Nightlife*, followed by a recurring role as Hailey on ABC’s *Nashville*. But her character on *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* was the dream role that catapulted her into the

spotlight gazed upon by legions of Marvel fans. Since *S.H.I.E.L.D.* debuted in 2013, Bennet has also nabbed lead roles in MGM’s 1980s-set musical rom-com *Valley Girl* and voiced Yi in the animated DreamWorks feature *Abominable*—a role special to her because of its representation of Asian Americans. Next up she’ll star in the drama *5 Years Apart*, which currently has a to-be-determined release date. Bennet is also the co-founder of RUN (Represent. Us. Now.), an organization devoted to being a political and cultural voice for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

With *S.H.I.E.L.D.*’s swan song arriving in a matter of weeks, a major chapter of Bennet’s life is coming to a close—something she’s still coming to terms with. Ben-



net, who like us is currently practicing social distancing, spoke with *Playboy* about her emotional final days on the show that made her a star. She also discussed how her own half-Asian heritage made its way into the story line, along with her thoughts on diversity in Hollywood, time travel and whether she believes in extraterrestrial life.

PLAYBOY: Let's get the obvious question out of the way. How are you handling this whole quarantine situation?

BENNET: I'm just doing the best I can. I wake up, panic, eat breakfast, panic. Scroll through Instagram, panic. Try to journal and do something healthy, panic. I think that's normal. I do puzzles now—like a thousand-piece puzzle. And it's honestly harder than I thought. I'm just trying to not be panicked about the fact that I panicked, and I think that's been the best way of doing it. But honestly, seven seasons of *SHIELD* prepared me for something like this. It feels like we're living out a real-life *SHIELD* episode, so luckily I'm relatively used to it.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk some *SHIELD*. I don't know what the script-reveal process is like, but what was your first reaction to reading the script for the very last episode?

BENNET: I'm almost always the last person to see or read anything. We get them very last-minute. I actually have video footage of me before reading it. I don't know why I'm super dramatic, but I vividly remember the last script. I remember seeing it pop up in my e-mail—to have that finally pop up after seven years, knowing it was the last one, was pretty surreal. I kind of made a moment out of it. I lit a candle, I got a glass of wine, I read it, I cried. It was odd knowing we still had to shoot it, and it's a big, big episode. *Agents of SHIELD* moved very quickly. Quarantine has been interesting, because it's giving me a lot of time to reflect on how crazy, chaotic and special that experience was.

PLAYBOY: Overall, are you satisfied with Daisy Johnson's ending?

BENNET: I would say I'm pretty happy with it. Obviously it's an ensemble show, so I'm invested in the other characters as much as I am with Daisy. It's really hard to wrap up everyone's characters, but they did a really sweet and wonderful job at giving the actors and the fans some closure for each character. And they do it in a cool way. I think for anyone who has been watching the show since season one, it's a very rewarding ending.

PLAYBOY: Can you hint at whether Daisy finally finds true love? She's had some bad luck with men.

BENNET: It's an understatement to say she's had bad luck. I'm pretty sure all her boyfriends have died or been murdered or tried to murder her or, like, kill her parents, something like that. I'm rooting for her to find love, for sure. There's that classic saying: If you can't find love in the present, you time-travel to every decade and try to find it there. And that might work out for her. We'll have

to wait and see.

PLAYBOY: You've had some surprise visitors over the years, including characters Nick Fury, Peggy Carter from *Captain America* and Lady Sif from *Thor*. Since this is the last season, are you guys going big in the cameo department?

BENNET: What's fun about the show is that our fans are so much more interested in what's happening with the lead characters now. Obviously we have a lot of people come back who have been on the show in past seasons. During the first season we got asked that a lot. Like "What Avenger is going to come by?" Now it's "Are Fitz and Simmons going to make it?" Or "What's going to happen with Yo-Yo and Mack, or Coulson and Daisy?" So it's been fun to see different versions of characters we've been with for seven years. I'm sure we have certain scenes everyone will come to know and love once the finale airs—scenes where everyone was together. It's surreal. Fans are probably going to be more excited about that than anything else.

"I vividly remember the last script. I remember seeing it pop up in my e-mail—to have that finally pop up after seven years, knowing it was the last one, was pretty surreal."

PLAYBOY: You talked about how emotional reading the final script was. How emotional was the very last day on set with the cast and crew?

BENNET: Oh my God. It was wild. It was kind of a bummer because I was shooting fight sequences the whole time, and fights are the worst thing to shoot when you're emotional. It's like opposite sides of the brain. I was basically on the verge of tears all day, and it was emotionally draining. We had our wrap parties the same day. So as I was shooting these fights, we literally had actors from every season just showing up. It was a good 20-hour day; I'm still tired from it. And then cleaning out my trailer and walking off those stages—we shot on those stages for the past seven years, and like two days later they took them down. That meant it was really the end, and it has taken me this entire time in quarantine to kind of come to terms with that.

PLAYBOY: You've gone through rigorous martial-arts training for those action sequences. Now that it's all over, will you stick with the training regimen so you're always prepared for other action roles?

BENNET: Right after we wrapped shooting, I was like, "I never want to sweat again in my life." It was so much fun to shoot those scenes, but it was a lot of hard work. I don't think I realized how much of a toll it took on my body. I'm fighting in heels, and you're on your feet all day. That was physically draining. I'm not going to lie. It's been nice to not move that much in quarantine. We moved at such a fast pace that we would have about 45 minutes to go over a fight, and then we'd go straight into shooting it. But that just makes me prepared for anything. I feel like any movie could come my way and I would know how to do it, just because of that. It's so ingrained. But I will say it's been really nice to trade in my Quake suit for a tracksuit and watch Netflix.

PLAYBOY: Do you think we've seen the last of Daisy Johnson/Quake? Back in October Brie Larson said that some of the female stars of the MCU were bugging Kevin Feige about an all-female superhero movie. Would you be game for that?

BENNET: If they would have me, I would love to be part of that. She's an Avenger in certain comic books, so I would absolutely love that. With the Marvel universe you can never say never. Look at Clark Gregg. He has died probably 800 million times as Coulson and comes back to life. I'll always have room in my heart for playing Daisy. I'd be very excited if that opportunity came to me.

PLAYBOY: You star in the new comedy-musical remake of *Valley Girl*. After seven years of Marvel action, are you branching out into other genres?

BENNET: Definitely. I would love to. People don't realize how physical the role of Daisy was because we have stunt doubles, who are incredible, but I pride myself on doing all my own stunts, so it was incredibly physical. Honestly, I can't even believe I got cast to play a superhero. That's kind of hilarious. I have six brothers, so I was always terrible at sports, which is why I got into acting. I actually loved and always wanted to do comedies and romantic comedies. Those are the things I love to watch, so I will definitely be moving forward with something a little different—maybe something where I don't get beat up every episode.

PLAYBOY: In this season of *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, time travel plays a big role. You get to go back to the 1930s and play dress-up in costumes from that era.

BENNET: It's so much fun.

PLAYBOY: If you had the opportunity to legitimately go back in time, are you the type who would change anything, or would you leave everything as is?

BENNET: That's a good question. It's one we struggle with on the show, but absolutely. There's an inside joke among my friends that I'm obsessed with period pieces. As a kid I would be so mad that I couldn't go back in time. A big part of why I wanted to start acting is because it's pretty much the closest thing to feeling like you're going back in time.

PLAYBOY: In *Valley Girl* you basically got to teleport back to the 1980s.

BENNET: As a half-Asian girl, I always thought they weren't going to necessarily need me in a Renaissance movie. Things have changed now, but I thought I was never going to have the opportunity to be in these period pieces. Now with *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, I get to skip around and basically do several different decades. Every episode was so much fun. It just changes the energy on set. All the props are different, the set is completely different. To go through the specific looks and decide which kind of character, what kind of girl I would be in each time period, and what kind of style I would

have. There are a lot of things I would probably want to do if I really did go back in time. But it's also a dangerous thing to mess with.

PLAYBOY: On *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, you've encountered robots, artificial intelligence, aliens and other extraterrestrial life. What's your personal belief about alien life?

BENNET: I definitely think there's life out there. I don't know who said it, but what's the quote? "Two possibilities exist. Either we are alone in the universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying." I love that, and we deal with that a bit in this season. But I do believe in aliens. They're in my dreams all the time. Listen, quarantine has me dreaming some weird shit, to be honest.

PLAYBOY: On your Instagram and Twitter accounts you've been vocal about diversity and equal opportunity in Hollywood. The cast of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* has been pretty diverse since the show debuted in 2013, and Marvel even altered Quake's backstory to fit your real-life heritage. You voiced one of the leading roles in DreamWorks' *Abominable*, which features mostly Asian animated characters. And now Marvel has its first big Asian superhero coming

in next year's *Shang-Chi*. Are you overall satisfied with the progress so far?

BENNET: We have more work to do, because it's still a topic. Once it's not a topic, our work is done. That's going to take a long time, but we're definitely taking steps in the right direction. People should be cast because they're good at what they do and are right for the role. And that's that. Part of that is a systemic issue. Certain actors or certain people get more experience and can grow and become better because they were allowed to have that experience. So it's really about giving people the chance, especially Asian actors. For me, as a mixed-Asian actress going into the show, I was really proud that they cast me because I was right for the role. And then within that, they made my character fit me. They really played into that and the Chinese culture of Daisy and the fact that she was half Asian and half white. That's really special.

We need to cater more to things like that to make it more a unique experience rather than forced diversity.

People can tell when content is forced. We don't need to do that. Talented actors of all different colors are out there. The more we can come together as a community, whether you're black, white or Asian, the better. I'm proud of what the show has done in that regard, especially being a female character. As much as we want to see Daisy find love, this was definitely a discovery of self for her. And that resonated with a lot of young women. What our show never really did was "Strong female characters, yeah!" It just is. And when things are just the way they are and we're not talking about it, that's when things have changed. No one else could have played Mack but Henry Simmons, and he happens to be black. That's why everyone was so good. And so I hope we go more in that direction.

"Fights are the worst thing to shoot when you're emotional. It's like opposite sides of the brain. I was basically on the verge of tears all day, and it was emotionally draining."

MARVEL
AGENTS OF
S.H.I.E.L.D.
100th EPISODE CELEBRATION







Ashley Perkins

Model @ashley_Perkins_







Congratulations on your Playboy feature! How do you feel? I'm absolutely thrilled! Life has been a whirlwind of delightful surprises and small, unexpected moments that light up my world. Being featured in the iconic Playboy Magazine has been a lifelong dream, and I'm incredibly grateful for this amazing opportunity.

What is your best physical feature? Since childhood, I've been nicknamed 'Smiley' for my ever-present smile, and I believe it is one of my greatest assets. A smile not only brightens someone else's day but is also so contagious, spreading joy in a world that could use more of it.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you? I'm naturally quite shy and a bit of a homebody, often slow to warm up to new people. But once I get talking, it's hard to stop me! I'm also a passionate sports enthusiast, with an unwavering love for the Buffalo Bills. My competitive spirit thrives on cheering for my favorite team; there's nothing quite like it.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? I envision myself as happy, cherishing every moment as I do now. I live life one day at a time, and it never ceases to surprise me. Always ready for spontaneous adventures, I dream of one day owning my own Taco Bell—half-joking, but my love for their tacos is real! I might need a little help with this obsession, though.

Outside of modeling, what are some of your passions or projects you're currently working on? I'm a part-time tennis instructor and former competitive junior player, once a nationally ranked state champion coached by Andre

Agassi's former travel coach. Tennis was a cornerstone of my life back then, and I'm thrilled to remain involved in the sport. I'm eager to grow my YouTube channel, hoping to incorporate travel vlogs and restaurant reviews in the future. Balancing my busy online platforms makes finding extra time a challenge, but I'm excited to dive deeper into these passions.

Who inspires you the most, either in modeling or in life in general? My mom is my greatest role model, inspiring me for countless reasons. She taught me to aim high and always believe in myself, instilling a strong work ethic and the conviction that anything is possible with dedication and effort. What I admire most is her free-spirited nature; she thinks independently and lives life boldly outside the box, qualities she's passed on to me. I believe my best traits—kindness, loyalty, selflessness, and a deep appreciation for each day—reflect her teachings and example. More than just a mother, she's my best friend, fiercest supporter, and the person I do life with. I am blessed and irreplaceable, and my iPhone ensures I stay close to the people I care about most.

What's next for you any goals, projects, or dreams you're excited about? My ultimate dream is to own my own home

complete with a chef's kitchen, and I'm diligently saving to make it a reality. As a Culinary Arts graduate, cooking is my passion, and my game-day snacks are legendary. Speaking of game day, I'm a massive Buffalo Bills fan, quite possibly their biggest! Whether I'm cheering from home at a game-day party or in the stands, being part of the Bills Mafia feels like family. The Bills and their fans are renowned for their philanthropy, turning negativity into positivity by supporting charities and even

other teams and players. This generosity is one reason I'm such a proud fan. So, let me say it: "Go Bills!"

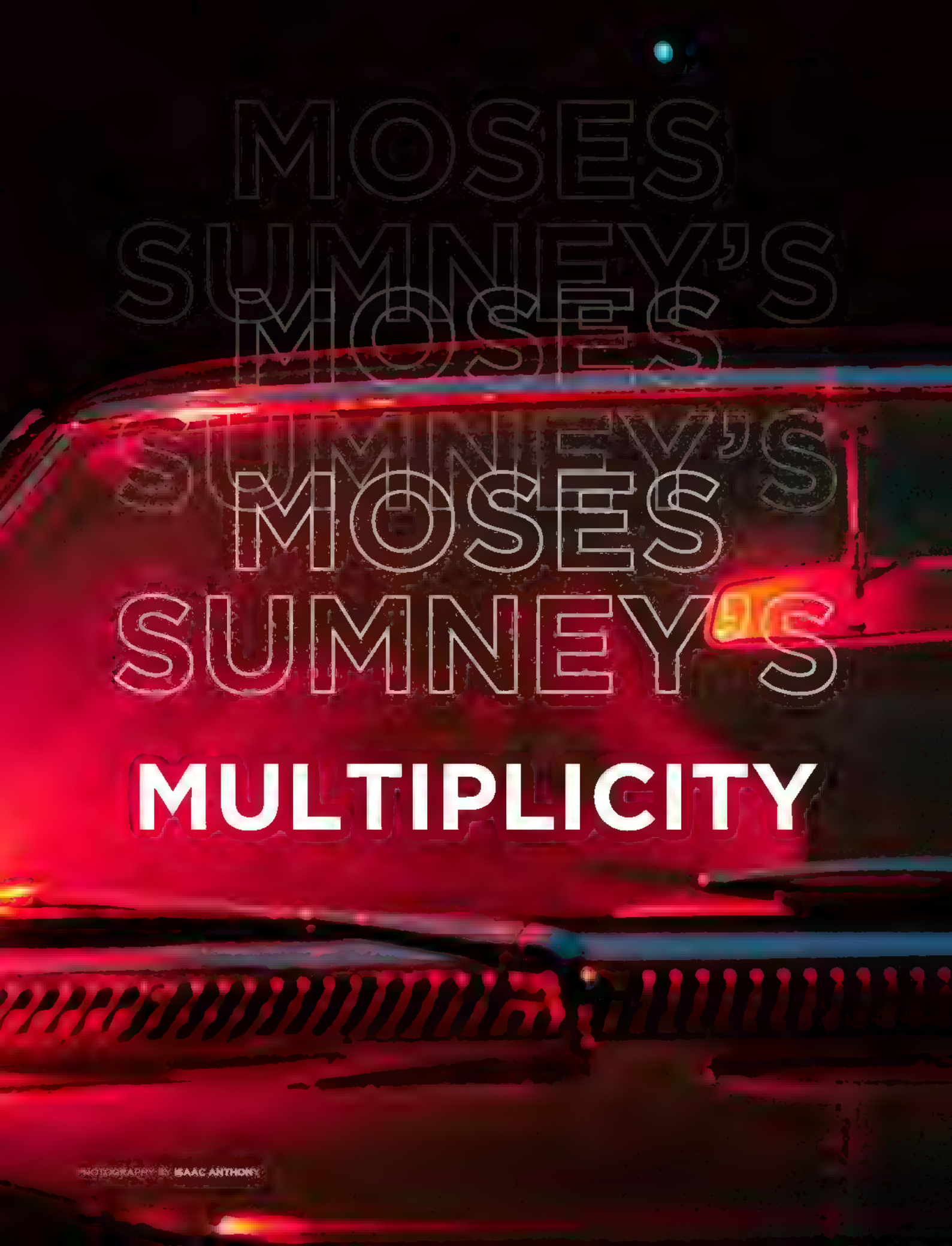
What advice would you give to aspiring models? Sharing advice with new models is a big task, as there's so much to say! First, know yourself, understand your goals, and create a clear plan to achieve them. Work hard and show up consistently every day. Surround yourself with supportive people who genuinely care about your success, as not everyone will. Let your unique personality shine through in everything you do; that authenticity will set you apart. Be an individual; there's only one you, and that's your greatest asset.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers and where can they find you? I'm incredibly grateful to everyone who supports me on my platforms and lifts me up on tough days. My fans inspire me to keep creating, and without their encouragement, I wouldn't be where I am today. I'll always cherish those who believe in me and champion my dreams. You can find me on OnlyFans and Playboy, and visit my website at AshleyPerkinsOfficial.com to top it all off, a huge "Go Bills!" 2025 is our year, and I'll see you at the Super Bowl!









MOSES
SUMNEY'S
MOSES'S

SUMNEY'S
MOSES'S
SUMNEY'S

MULTIPLICITY



With his sprawling new album, 'Grae,' the chameleonic artist demonstrates the joy—and the urgency—of defying labels

BY STEPHANIE SMITH-STRICKLAND

If he were a marble-hewn bust, Moses Sumney would be a masterpiece of plurality. bi-tone eyebrows, a jaunty loc crown, low-cut bleached-blond sides. Yet on this late-February day in Los Angeles, the very human artist is posing, leanly muscled and shirtless, in billowing black pants and an equally inky structural hat he jokingly observes resembles a gele.

His figure contrasts dramatically with the verdant backdrop of stubby lemon and orange trees spaced precisely across the small field behind him. Moments earlier, he and a stylist flirted with the idea of a plumed pirate hat paired with a sheer shirt he described as “a bit too Renaissance fair,” though the accompanying nipple blockers piqued his interest. The deliberations echo Sumney’s high school years, when he was not yet brave enough to sport the goth looks he secretly coveted.

The child of Ghanaian immigrants—who he later learned entered the country without papers—Sumney now resides in Asheville, North Carolina, where, according to the artist, everyone is a bit weird so he fits right in. In 2018 and for a large portion of 2019, he was locked away in isolation (well before it was a transnational requirement) finishing his second album, *Grae*, half of which appeared early this year. *Grae* follows the critically acclaimed *Aromanticism*, released in 2017 while Sumney was still floating on the accolades from his 2016 EP, *Lamentations*. His 2014 breakout, *Mid-City Island*, is a bewitchingly nebulous EP created on a four-track cassette recorder gifted to him by Dave Sitek of TV on the Radio.

By 2015 Sumney seemed poised for a more traditional kind of stardom, appearing on the opening track of Beck’s album *Song Reader* and capturing the ear of fellow musicians James Blake and Solange, with whom he remains a close collaborator. He was seen as something of an indie darling by the major labels that courted him—a provocateur whose raw talent could be shaped into a more palat-

able idea of black indie artistry. He enjoyed the courting phase but ultimately turned down major-label offers in favor of Jagjaguwar, an indie label that has been home to Bon Iver, Unknown Mortal Orchestra, Sharon Van Etten and more. The label released *Aromanticism* and, on May 15, the full edition of *Grae*.



Hat, pants, and boots, vintage



Weighing in at 20 tracks and just over an hour in length, the project is a sprawling, open-ended statement on liberation and existing in liminal spaces. Its themes are starkly evoked in the song “also also also and and and,” wherein Sumney intones, “I really do insist that others recognize my inherent multiplicity / What I no longer do is take pains to explain it or defend it.”

“I realized over the course of the record that I could do anything,” Sumney says, seated in a lofted alcove of the private home where the shoot took place, “and that the permission to do it is granted by me. So why not be audacious?” It’s a rhetorical question, but it raises another: Is Sumney’s audacity sustainable in an industry that tends to pay lip service to individuality while cramming it into boxes?

Much of the project’s narrative language is established through spoken vignettes courtesy of friends and creators such as author and cultural critic Taiye Selasi, writer and speaker Ayesha K. Faines, actor Ezra Miller, writer Michael Chabon and actress Michaela Coel. Their voices provide structural reinforcement to Sumney’s observations on the inherently fluid nature of cultural identity, gender identity and sexuality. Throughout the album, Sumney ruminates on how different modes of conforming to society can, if one has the courage, be deconstructed and then reconstructed to reflect personal truths in spaces of solitude.

“insula,” Grae’s opening number, begins with a looped, disembodied voice reciting “isolation comes from insula which means island” over a swelling string arrangement. For Sumney, who left his previous life in Los Angeles in 2017, the quietude of Asheville became exactly that—an island where he could freely reflect and, like a caterpillar in a cocoon, prepare for transformation.

“It’s hard to care what other people think when you’re not constantly confronted with it,” he says in a rich, slightly weathered alto. “Living in L.A. you’re constantly confronted with not only what other people think of you but your consciousness of what other people think of you. They might not be thinking anything at all, but you move in space in a way that you’re constantly confronted with your own self. Being less and less around people, I was constantly confronted with myself—but not myself to the eyes of others, just myself to the eyes of my own desires. I always seek to be honest in the work, and I felt the most honest thing I could do was follow those desires, which are rather varied.”

In the video for “Virile,” one of Grae’s lead singles, a shirtless Sumney dances through a meat locker, both taunting and fleeing from symbols of toxic masculinity with the abandon of a whirling dervish. It’s a fitting accompaniment to a song that mulls over the constructions of masculinity, rejecting its binding tropes over a soundscape of harp, flute, strings and bass (the last one courtesy of producer, Kendrick Lamar collaborator and low-end virtuoso Thundercat). Bombastic and theatrical but at times deeply introspective, Sumney’s voice acts as a liquid binding agent, melding the instrumentals into a cohesive waking dream, or nightmare, for those enmeshed in the performance of maleness.

“I’m actually getting back into it,” Sumney says. “Masculinity, when it’s positive, is sick as fuck. Unfortunately, the toxic version of it is what reigns on the earth. It’s important to understand that there is masculinity and femininity in everyone, if you choose to identify with those two things. There are people who don’t with either, and that’s fine as well. I just think it’s a natural part of the earth that they both exist. So now I’m just trying to think, what are the positive forms in which masculinity can exist? Sometimes masculinity is in women, and sometimes it’s in men. It’s the same thing with femininity, right? So now I’m like, ‘Oh cool, I actu-

ally quite like being a man.’ As long as it’s not oppressive.”

Such observations play into Sumney’s larger thesis. We should all be free to exist in gray areas and to bend the rules in the same way those with structural privilege have always gotten away with doing. “In terms of who gets to bend the rules, it’s foremost white men,” he says. “It was fascinating to me how a lot of the tropes for how a man is supposed to act come from mainstream white society, but also the people who are forgiven the most for breaking those rules are then white men.”



Hat and pants: Cameron Williams

He goes on: "Growing up—not just in an African household, because it applies to black Americans as well—and thinking about the structure of the performance of masculinity and how much I could bend it, or weave in and out of it, was a process of unlearning. I think a big part of the unlearning was being like, Well, [white men] are doing it, so why the hell can't I? Your life might be harder, but you do have the choice."

Existing authentically outside assigned spaces, potentially sacrificing ease and profit, has no doubt complicated Sumney's career, but it has also given him a gift: the ability to grow and learn without the obstruction of others' expectations. Not everyone receives the gift, as he recently reinforced in a lengthy Twitter thread highlighting the many indie black artists (a number of them queer) he felt deserved more recognition.

Sumney's position brings forward an interesting dichotomy: On the one hand, popular music often embraces expressions of fluidity. From Prince to Freddie Mercury to Patti Smith, there's a long line of mainstream artists whose experimentation with ideas of gender and sexuality are inherent in their personal and professional identities. But their existence is the exception and not the rule—doubly so for non-white artists, many of whom are pigeonholed by the expectation that they adhere to tropes associated with prevailing ideas of "black music."

The weight of such implications is more than theoretical. It's genuinely difficult for left-of-center emerging talents to find ways to meaningfully take up space—to navigate their careers authentically when carving out said space is contingent on assimilation. Whether it's Sumney or an artist like K. Michelle, who gained prominence as an R&B singer purely because she was dissuaded from marketing herself as a country artist, we constantly see this conflict at work. More troubling, perhaps, is how easy it often is for white artists to move outside this framework, effortlessly shifting between identities, genre delineations and more, completely oblivious to the fact that their peers of color are rarely extended the same grace.

"There's the simple fact that once you do something in the world, it's like the world expects you to do it forever," says fellow musician Shaun Ross, whose albinism made him an uncommon face in the modeling world. Ross is transitioning into a music career, but he's finding that his history as a model and his experimental sonic aesthetic are often difficult for mainstream audiences to reconcile. Like Sumney's music, Ross's funk- and futurism-inflected sounds underlie queer experiences while defying easy categorization. Although his music has earned him a devoted fan base, it has also created hurdles in his efforts to infiltrate more mainstream music

spaces.

"People must understand that before anything we are artists," says Ross. "We should all be able to have this freedom of expression that isn't attached to the need for labels, whether that be in regards to gender, race, sexuality or anything else."

Grae does not ask permission to do what Ross describes, create in a multitude of ways, all of which are true to the artist. Sumney's approach feels infinitely more exciting than dialogues that seek to make concrete constructs of the amorphous. "We have identity, and then identity on a national scale, and those conversations can be really porous and really shallow, and are really kind of boring," he says. "Everyone is just saying the same thing over and over. Whether they're on one side or the other side, it's just two sides of things. In a way, I didn't want to talk about it, because then I'd still be talking about identity. But it was honest to this project."

Sumney also leaned on his cross-cultural and cross-continental upbringing as inspiration for Grae. The upheaval of living between drastically different worlds produced a feeling of statelessness but also an understanding of how identity as it relates to nation, gender and even sexuality feels absolute only in certain environments—and why conversations around community and





belonging can be myopic

"I was thinking about what it was like growing up on both coasts — on the coast of Africa and the coast of America," he says. "It made me think about how the foundation of my personality or identity is displacement, and where that comes from. I've been thinking more about feeling displaced, and that maybe I like different kinds of things because my life has been a mix of a lot of genres and I never fully welcomed any of them."

Like Sumney, Ghanaian American musician, singer-songwriter and engineer Amaarae grew up between Ghana and the U.S. Her music is also grounded in the exploration of identity. During time spent in Atlanta, she devoured Southern rap. In predominantly white suburban New Jersey, she discovered alternative and post-punk. Today the singer's falsetto croonings draw parallels to Esther Jones,

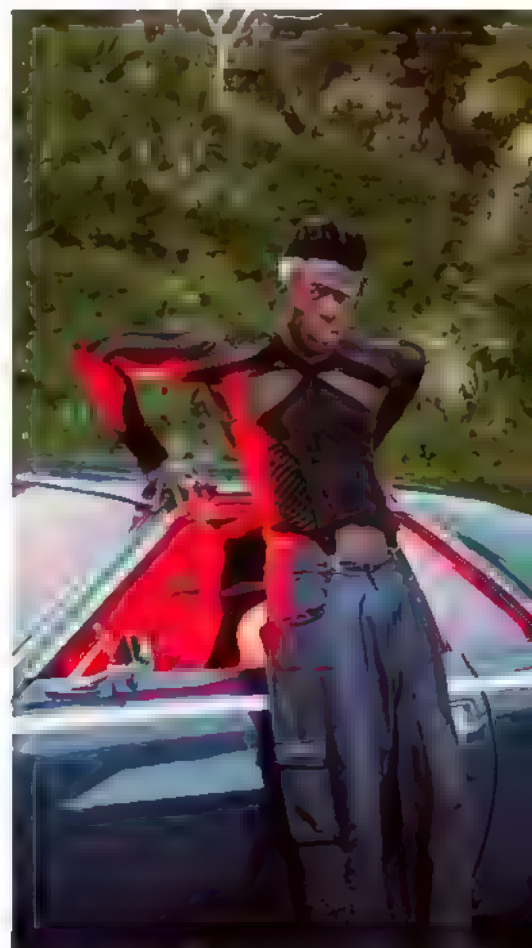
the Roaring Twenties black jazz singer who was the inspiration for the character Betty Boop. Echoing Sumney's ruminations on both romantic and asexual love in projects such as *Passionfruit Summers*, which features her 2017 single "Fluid," Amaarae challenges ideas of femininity, juxtaposing a babyish voice with an often androgynous presentation.

"The concept of fluidity can mean so many things," she says. "For me the idea of fluidity transcends what people typically associate it with, which is sexuality or gender. I actually think adaptation is a form of fluidity, and I guess that's something I've always experimented with. Living somewhere like Smyrna, Georgia and wearing Hot Topic to me is fluid. Kids were wearing Jordans and Iverson jerseys and I'm wearing goth clothing, and they're looking at me like, 'What the fuck?' But pushing those boundaries and setting off those ideas in people's heads of what it means to live in your identity — all those things are important to me in my music and in my life."

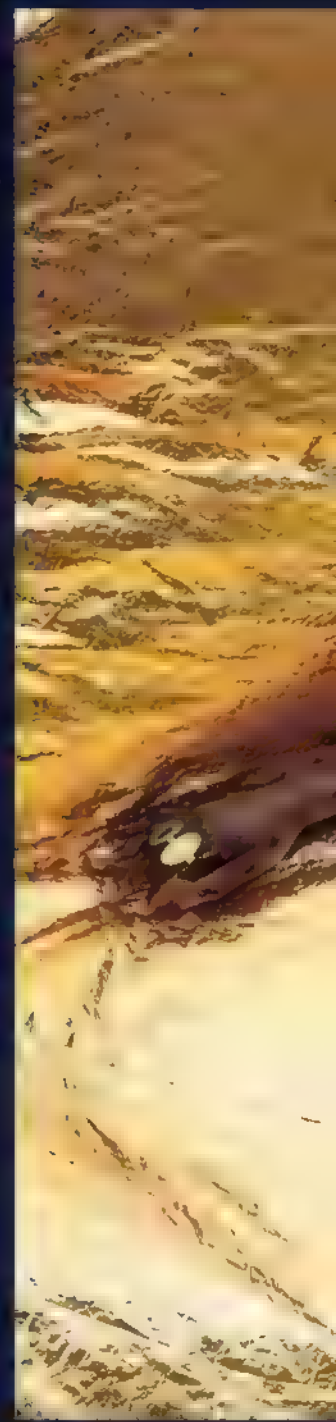
While living in Los Angeles, Sumney similarly found herself questioning what it meant to take on an identity, more specifically one tied to blackness.

"I'd spent years trying to build community with people," he says. "This is actually way too honest, but I don't care. I actually found that for me, building with

people, especially black people, I sometimes had to do it in ways that felt unnatural. Unnatural only because in order to be accepted, I had to shave down things about myself, shave down things about my personality, get rid of certain types of friends so I would be liked. I felt that was a necessary sacrifice, because it was important to me, and still is, to have community with black people and uplift black people. Then I was in isolation, and I was like, 'Oh, now I'm in community with the trees and birds and squirrels!'"



Top: Marvin Desros. Photo: Vintage



He allows a laugh and dives back in. "I had time to think about why we create these structures. Why do I have to pledge allegiance in a way that minimizes my individuality? I kind of started to rebel, and in diving deep and thinking about it, I still realized how necessary it is for people to have community, especially people who are marginalized and rejected by mainstream society. Community was and is a protective measure, and I think it really helped me empathize a lot better, even if the ways they built community can be unhealthy and damaging."

For all his talk of isolation and individuality, Sumney finds himself making a case—a characteristically complex one—for community

That would explain Gracie's cast of contributors. It's an irony that reveals itself the more you listen: Without that range of voices, the album would feel less unified. This is the force that pushes Gracie beyond a testament to solitude or an exploration of mere duality. Sumney's world contains as many sides as we need in order to encompass our true selves—emotionally, romantically, physically, and beyond.

In a way, it's a self-effacing move made by a unmissable man, an openness he hints at as he explains his thinking behind that patchwork of spoken interludes.

"I knew I didn't want to talk on the record," he says. "I knew I needed a way to tie the songs together, because sonically the songs are just so disparate that they needed to blend into each other in order for it to feel like a cohesive experience. And then with those interludes, it was like, Okay, well—people need to talk."





Sex and Spirituality



Combine to Create
Your Favorite
Bedroom Toys





Perhaps you've never truly taken the time to consider what goes into making some of your favorite sex toys, or maybe the process doesn't interest you enough to give it a real thought. Regardless, I'm willing to bet that you've never thought about the spirituality that goes into crafting some of your favorite bedroom props.

But such is the case when it's Anjani Siddhartha who's creating them.

The separation between sexuality and spirituality is a tale as old as time, and a fable at that. Although we don't have nearly enough time (or energy, let's be real) to deconstruct the root of that conditioning, we can focus on how the dance between the two can actually create a harmony that few allow themselves the pleasure

to experience. Siddhartha wants to aid those who are on that journey.

The artist stumbled upon her job at Doc Johnson, the largest sex toy manufacturer in the U.S., after a friend asked if she'd like to replace him in a design job. Going into the job blind yet open, Siddhartha was shocked to realize she'd be sculpting sex toys—but it was a task she wasn't going to back down from. She designs the sex toys either by making casts from adult performers or sculpting them vein by vein from her imagination. Painstakingly getting the shape of a penis head just right is simply

part of her job.

"To me it is art," Siddhartha tells me. "I liked the environment and having my own studio, so I started designing that day."

Enter the Doc Johnson headquarters and you'll find Siddhartha tucked away in her own erotic cave, handcrafting some of the brand's most famous dildos and other adult toys while surrounded by art and objects that inspire her.

"I have been very sensual and spiritual all my life, so my inspiration has always been fine arts and the sensual paintings of India," Siddhartha says.

"When I design a piece, it is just as if I am working on a sacred piece that will bring physical and emotional pleasure to thousands of people all over the world," she says. "It is part of my way of life, creating and shaping an object that will bring pleasure to many. Also, it is part of my meditation of being in the moment when I am sculpting."

From the devotional tattoos that decorate her arms to the intentional focus that is hard to ignore while watching her work, it's clear Siddhartha is no stranger to spirituality.

Her primary goal is always to "be here and now and fully aware of the unity of myself as a consciousness using the body-mind vehicle to express myself in the physical universe with integrity. And to use this very moment to live to the fullest following my passion."

Through her spirituality and deep connection to her own sensuality, Siddhartha has managed to design and craft unique bedroom toys for over two decades with the objective of providing consumers the chance to experience something greater than themselves.

"Through sensual experiences, we can transcend to a place where body and mind sensations can be refined to feel divine," she says. "There's unity in diversity."

Nonetheless, Siddhartha is aware that much of her life is rooted in the intersection of two concepts that don't usually mix. For many, sex toys are still considered taboo. Sprinkle that with some religious viewpoints and you might as well light a fire, because that conversation is going to get heated.

Still, Siddhartha says she's hopeful that through her work, people can reconnect with the parts of themselves that have been silenced, either out of shame or judgement, because that duality is alive in all of us whether we acknowledge it or not.

"We live in the world of duality, so it is expected to always have opposite views on every subject," she says. "But the world is ever-changing, and if people open their minds to other possibilities they can be more tolerant of the ways others live their lives."

Although the jury is still out on that, Siddhartha can't deny that the sex toy industry has changed tremendously during her time at Doc Johnson.

"The internet has become the biggest influence in the industry, as I am sure it is for most enterprises and life in general," she says. "Now we can go to forums and see what customers are looking for, reactions to products, what others are doing in the same space. We do surveys, and also have many celebrities endorsing products. It has made the industry a bit more mainstream."

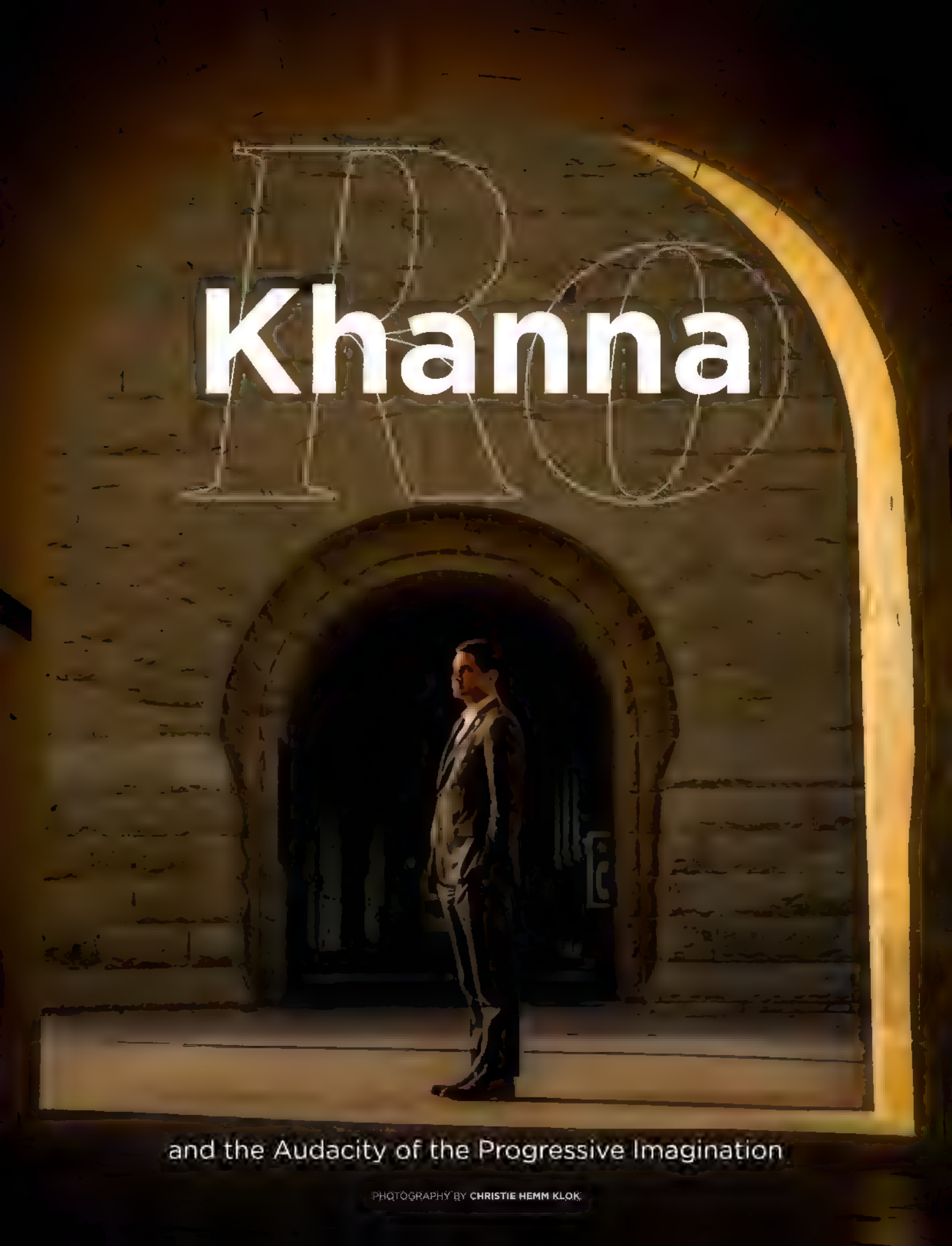
The industry's audience has also become more inclusive.

"Now it is not a male-dominated space, but also couples and women," Siddhartha says, adding that it's no longer seen as the "sleazy, dark store in a bad part of town, but the fancy boutique where ladies and couples buy their products to experiment with new sensual adventures."

Not only that, but, as Siddhartha has proven for more than 20 years, there is actual artistry put into the creation of your favorite bedroom toys, with the intention of spiritually putting you back in touch with your sensuality—whether that's done with yourself or with someone else.

"It is part of my way of life, creating and shaping an object that will bring pleasure to many. It is part of my meditation."



A photograph of a man in a dark suit standing in profile within a stone archway. Above him, the letters 'I', 'N', and 'D' are visible, part of the word 'India'. The word 'Khanna' is written in large white letters across the middle of the image. The background is a textured stone wall. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong light source from the right creating a bright glow in the archway and casting shadows.

Ind Khanna

and the Audacity of the Progressive Imagination

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTIE HEMM KLOK

“

I was born in Philadelphia in 1976, the bicentennial, and put very simply, I just want this country to give everyone the chance that they gave me, a son of immigrants.”

The Silicon Valley congressman, along with other key Democrats, envisions a new future for the working class

BY ALEX THOMAS

Though Capitol Hill was empty due to the pandemic, there were rumblings of a legislative uprising outside the old marble halls.

In early April, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, a large but loose group of congress members who, to various extents, subscribe to progressive policies, was working legislative tricks hoping to bend the latest coronavirus stimulus bill further to the left. It was hardly a unique move for the group of lawmakers, and it had a predictable end—one in which Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi passed the bill she was aiming to get through. The moment seemed to reckon with a larger understanding of the current attitude in America, an attitude in which occupations like grocery cashier and delivery driver are now essential and even celebrated.

Early in the coronavirus pandemic, Congressman Ro Khanna, who represents a Silicon Valley district peppered with tech giants like Apple and Yahoo, joined Senator Elizabeth Warren in a proposal for an “Essential Workers Bill of Rights,” and called on Congress to include their policies in the next coronavirus relief package.

When Warren and Khanna released their proposal, Khanna highlighted the fights of essential workers, saying “the grocery clerk that packs our groceries behind a plastic shield, the bus driver sanitizing seats between shifts, and the security guard on watch from a distance, these heroic workers are keeping this country afloat. They deserve every benefit and protection we can give them, starting with those

outlined in our Essential Workers Bill of Rights.”

Khanna and Warren’s proposed Bill of Rights included some broad statements, such as, “All essential workers should get the care they need during this crisis, including those who are uninsured or under-insured, regardless of their immigration status.”

But there were other, fine-tuned requests, such as, “Any federal funding should be designed to ensure that employers cannot skirt the rules by firing or furloughing workers or reducing their hours or benefits in order to access a tax credit or avoid a worker protection requirement.”

For some, the Essential Workers Bill of Rights was a progressive flag in the ground. Nehmi Stamp of the Working Families Party praised the proposal during a conversation with Playboy. “We need an Essential Workers Bill of Rights,” she said. “It’s really, really clear that we need it more than ever to protect working people. And it’s really great that [Warren and Khanna] have been championing that fight.”

Stamp, like many progressives, is frustrated by the pace of change. “We, as the United States, need the level of investment that we’ve put in for things like war,” she added.

Khanna has become a powerful voice in Congress, in part because of the enormous tech riches shimmering in his district. He’s a tall and thin former Stanford lecturer who grew up in suburban Philadelphia as the son of middle-class immigrants. He entered Congress by running on a progressive platform and beating a Democratic congressman in a safe district. Two years later, a New York bartender named Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez would make the same play and become the youngest congresswoman in history and a household name overnight.

“Why can’t this country do that for everyone?” Khanna mused to Playboy in a December conversation in his office on Capitol Hill. “I was born in Philadelphia in 1976, the bicentennial. Put

very simply, I just want this country to give everyone the chance it gave me, a son of immigrants. So that’s really what my governing philosophy is.”

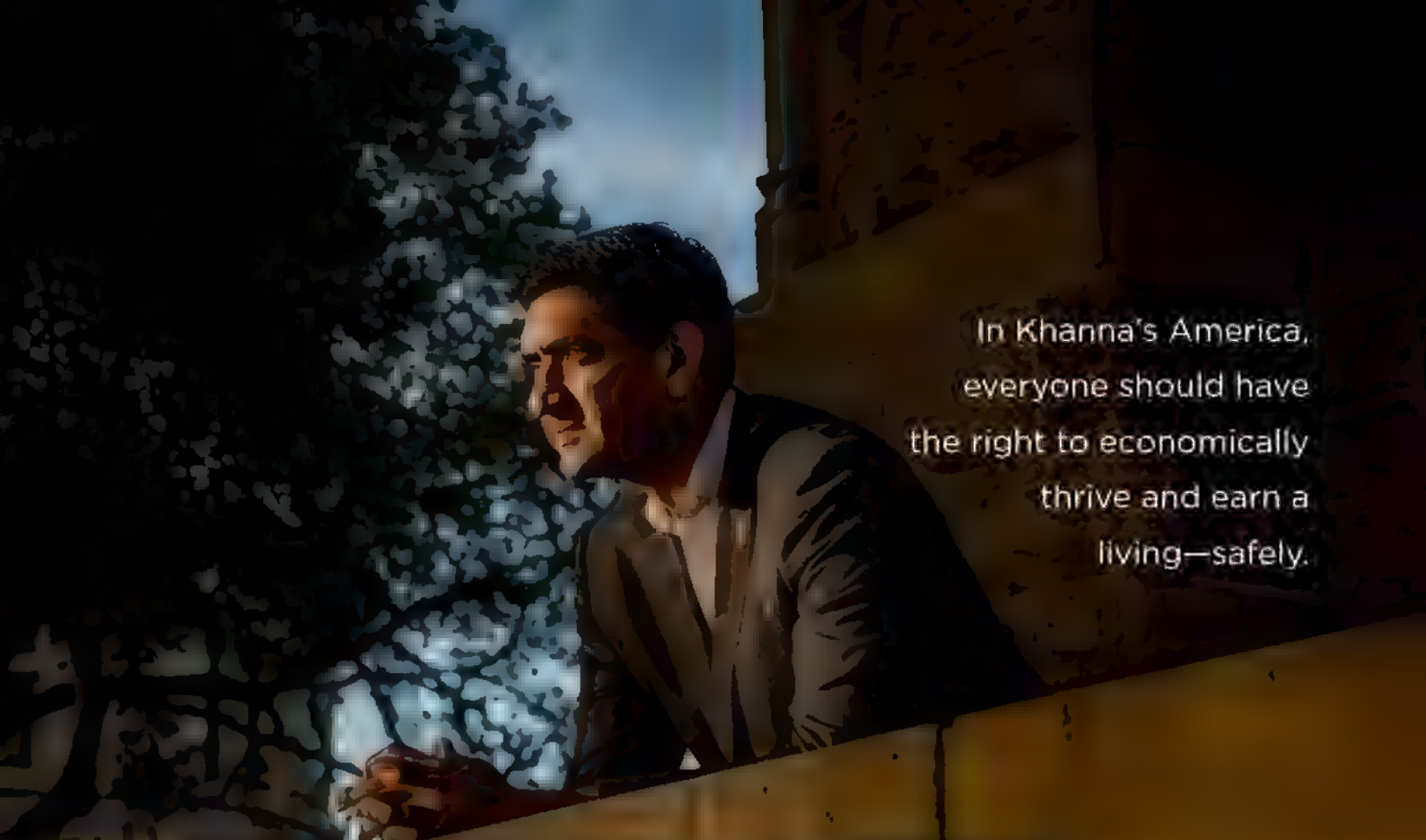
Khanna talks like the West Coast Ivy lecturer that he was for a few years. He has large ideas about jobs in the Midwest, with sidebars about things like the 1890s and the Industrial Revolution tracing to the 1929 stock market crash.

In addition to being a voice for economic equality and working-class protections in Silicon Valley, Khanna has dedicated his platform to advocating for marginalized groups that are often missing from the Capitol Hill conversation. Just last year, he introduced a pro-sex worker bill intended to combat the ill effects of SESTA-FOSTA, the controversial legislation aimed at curbing sex trafficking that instead made many legitimate sex workers’ jobs more difficult and dangerous.

Khanna told Playboy that he wants a full repeal, but that in the meantime we should “at least repeal the provisions that are overbroad and forcing sex workers out onto the street.” He added that he expects a study of SESTA-FOSTA would find that the policy “has led to increased violence and sexual assault against sex workers, and that the most impacted have been women of color, the LGBT+ community and the trans community.”

“Almost one-fifth of transgender individuals have engaged in sex work and are at higher risk for violence and higher risk for assault,” he said. “I don’t think there’s awareness about the link between the most marginalized communities and sex workers.”

In Khanna’s America, everyone should have the right to economically thrive and earn a living—safely. It shouldn’t matter if you’re a frontline healthcare worker, an Amazon factory worker, a white-collar



In Khanna's America,
everyone should have
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employee with the privilege of working from home or a sex worker

Khanna described the road to that America by saying, "You'd have to do [sex work decriminalization] thoughtfully in a way that you still criminalize sex trafficking and child trafficking, but you aren't going after sex workers."

Six months after our conversation in his comfortable Washington office, America is a nation in the grip of a virus. The death toll is climbing north from 115,000, and the country has relied for months on the grocery clerks and bus drivers that Khanna nodded to in his statement accompanying the Essential Workers Bill of Rights.

Outside the Capitol, I stood a few feet away from a masked Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. "We need to move closer to a point where healthcare is actually treated as a right," she told *Playboy*. "I don't think we should be subsidizing for-profit health insurance companies. I think we should be expanding Medicare to allow unemployed people to opt in."

Ocasio-Cortez's ideas echoed those set down in Khanna and Warren's proposal: their call for "a full federal subsidy of fifteen months of COBRA for employees who lose eligibility for health care coverage." The latest stimulus bill didn't fully achieve that, but it was

a nod to progressives like Khanna and Warren.

The progressive fight has come to the forefront during the pandemic, and expanding access to health care is at the center of that battle. For progressives in the mold of Khanna and Warren and AOC, it has been a driving point of their political philosophy. And even President Donald Trump seems to have briefly realized that this health crisis surpasses politics. When asked last month by a reporter at the White House if the coronavirus vaccine will be free, he responded, "We're looking at that, actually."

The progressive uprising that rumbled through the empty halls of Congress before the passage of the HEROES Act was voiced largely by Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, who co-chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Jayapal was the only member of the massive caucus to vote against the bill, and, in her statement accompanying that vote, she said she voted against the legislation in part because the bill "does not guarantee affordable and accessible health care for everyone." But Jayapal, who came to Congress in the same class as Khanna, is no longer the far-left voice in the wilderness of Congress. It is a body that's always shifting, under the constant strain of a nation that has seen two major political revolutions in Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the past four years.

In late April, a group of progressives released a list of demands that asked for the legislation that would become the HEROES Act to "ensure full health coverage with no out-of-pocket costs for any Covid-19 care by expanding Medicare to cover those on unemployment and those who have lost insurance." That letter included the signatures of Jayapal and Khanna.

Although former Vice President Joe Biden hails from the more centrist wing of the Democratic party, he seems to have realized that the progressive movement and its voters have at least earned a seat at the table. He announced unity task forces aimed at uniting the progressive and centrist wings of the party. Jayapal was named a co-chair of the task force on health care, Ocasio-Cortez was named a co-chair of the task force on climate change. The task force was an obvious nod to progressive voters who have never been enchanted by Biden. And change may sometimes be difficult; in April, Ocasio-Cortez told *The New York Times*, "The whole process of coming together should be uncomfortable for everyone involved."

The attention that progressives are earning in Congress and in the presidential race might not have been as powerful if we weren't living in a moment when essential workers have become the most important segment of our society. Alas, the pandemic has proven that the myth of reclusive billionaires and hedge fund managers and high-powered executives holding civilization together was greatly exaggerated. There is an obvious desire to keep the real backbone of society safe, and the progressives see their ideas as the best way to accomplish that goal.

But still, the progressives, a group with a seemingly Sisyphean task, have said that not enough is being done to protect those workers. While progressives toil to secure protections for essential workers in the pandemic, those workers carry on, delivering our packages, packing our grocery haul and, sometimes, saving our lives.



A person is lying down, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a white t-shirt. The white t-shirt has the text 'TALKING HEADS: 77' printed on it in blue and red. A smartphone is lying on the surface next to them, displaying a music player interface with a green and white album cover. The background is a warm, orange-brown color.

Let Dipsea Be the Soundtrack to Your Next Orgasm

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE



A new wave in adult content is here; let's just say it's easy on the ears

It's night 47 in quarantine, and it's time for my before-bed routine. Some lemongrass tea, a hit of my favorite hybrid vape, an overwrought skincare regimen and finally some toggling between Instagram, TikTok and Pornhub until the sandman carries me away. But this particular night I'm hoping for a different type of erotic stimulation—one that's a bit meditative rather than the usual vigorous and frenetic. I open the Dipsea app, something that's been bouncing around on my self-pleasure to-do list for months and that I finally have time to pursue.

I pop on my headphones and find an entire library of audio erotica, heavily curated according to sexual scenarios, identities and "heat levels." To be clear, I rarely engage aurally with adult content. For years I watched porn on mute after a horrifying college incident when I realized too late that my earbuds weren't plugged in. I had trained my brain to get off on visuals alone, so I wasn't expecting a lot from an audio erotica app.

The first story I randomly click on is a 15-minute narrative about a tattoo-shop visit turned hookup. I push "play" on the next scene, a yoga session that's hot in more ways than one, and move on to a wet and wild adventure in the rainy Irish countryside. I feel transported each time, and before I know it I've spent an hour swiping through scenes, spellbound.

Wanting to know more about the minds behind this sexual innovation, I decide to call Dipsea co-founder Gina Gutierrez at home in San Francisco, where she's currently quarantined with her partner. I find out Dipsea began—like many great ideas—around two in the morning with close friends and a bottle or two of wine.

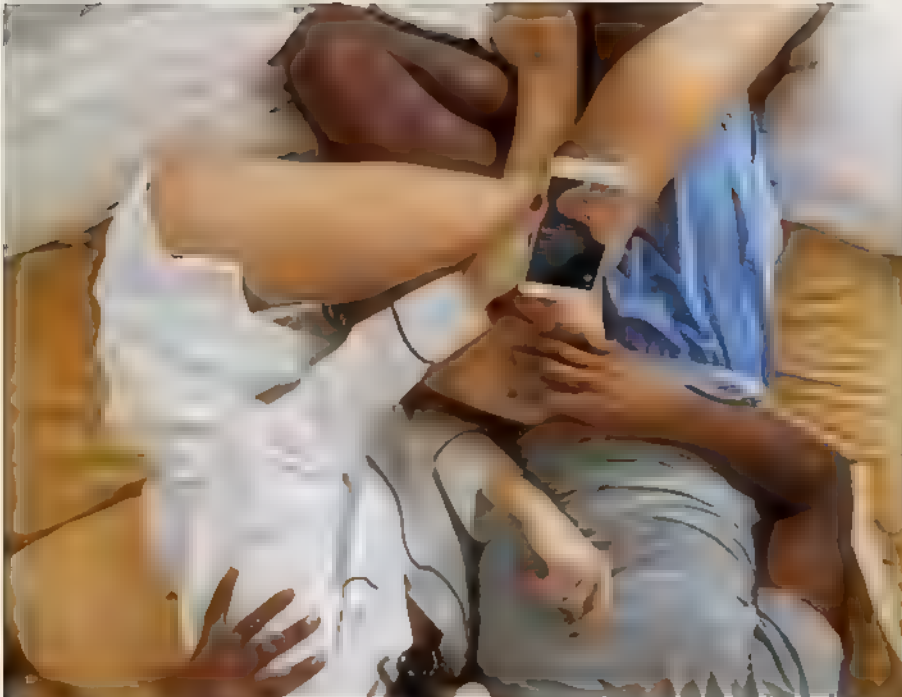
"To me, sex is so psychological," says Gutierrez. "The big miss was that people weren't talking about sex in any way related to the mind. It's always very physical. What are you thinking about when you're having sex? What are you thinking about when you're touching yourself?"

Gutierrez began asking her female friends what kind of sexy content they commonly found when they went searching for it. The answers were grim.

"A friend was like, 'I've searched the internet top and bottom, and it's scary out there. You find a lot of stuff that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, and it makes you not want to keep looking.' Those were the kinds of answers we were getting. The problem was so pervasive, and Faye [Keegan, Dipsea's other co-founder] and I just kind of got obsessed with the idea."

The fact that most adult content caters to a male gaze is no secret. (Anyone who has seen long acrylic nails in lesbian porn knows this.) Companies such as Bellesa and X-Art strive to make "porn for women," but the entire genre still assumes that all women get off in the same way: from what we see. Not everyone processes stimuli in the same way, and given how nuanced and layered women's sexuality can be, Gutierrez wanted to completely reimagine what it means to consume erotica.

For the seminal 2011 book *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*,



The Dipsea engineers curate the experience down to the **most minute details:** the crinkle of a condom wrapper being ripped open, the soft **whoosh** of a gown dropping to the floor.

neuroscientists Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam examined the internet-search histories of 650,000 people. They discovered a psychological chasm between men and women in terms of how they experience arousal. Men tend to be turned on by visuals and graphics, while women desire more of a narrative connection to the content. Gutierrez says this book became the “foundational document” behind Dipsea and that it’s still required reading for all new employees.

“What if we just stopped saying women should be sexual like men?” she asks. “What if we said, ‘Maybe there’s another way to approach it’? And what if we took a mind-first approach to sexuality?”

They decided audio would be a natural fit.

“There’s a quote I read recently that I love—something along the lines of ‘Audio is so intimate because it’s so closely aligned with how we think our thoughts.’ That starts to tap into how personalized the experience can feel, how intimate it can feel, how immersive it can feel, and that’s why we decided to tell these stories in audio.”

Visual porn places a heavy emphasis on appearance, age, race and body type, splintering off into a million subgenres. It’s accommodating in that no matter what you desire, you can likely find visual stimuli for it, but it’s limiting in that you can’t always employ your imagination. Watching porn for me is like staring at a completed piece of art hanging in a gallery, while listening to audio erotica is more akin to being given a blank coloring book and filling it in myself. I can stay inside the lines or scribble outside them. Both types of consumption are normal, it just depends on what floats your boat.

Shuhan, a Dipsea user in New York, says the app has helped her come to terms with her body in a new way. “As a woman from a conservative culture, to acknowledge and accept the healthy sexuality of a female was hard,” she tells *Playboy*. “Dipsea helps me to explore and understand the most natural and beautiful part of me. I now use the stories to enjoy alone time and even time with my husband.”

She adds, “Many times I share the app with my husband, and we use the stories as foreplay. Sometimes it’s more of an educational experience you get from guided sessions or informative stories.”

The app can also be a boon to those who can’t be physically near their partner, providing new ways to connect or just remain sexually satisfied on their own terms. “I’m in a long-distance relationship, and I have my own personal sexuality to tend to,” says Aalia, a Los Angeles-based fan of the app. “I was never into erotica, and Dipsea has definitely changed my habits. They’re really creative with the scenes they come up with and the quality of the acting and the writing. It’s just something I can connect with. It helps make self-pleasure more of an imaginative space.”

As Aalia points out, when it comes to creating these audio narratives, there’s a high level of production involved, from the scripts to the actors who bring the scenes to life. The Dipsea engineers curate the experience down to the most minute details: the crinkle of a condom wrapper being ripped open, the soft whoosh of a gown dropping to the floor. Combine that with a beautifully designed interface, and the result is an enthralling user experience. Dipsea currently has 230 stories live on the app, with new ones being added each week.

Ellen Ford, an L.A. fashion designer who collaborated with the Dipsea team to write a steamy narrative based on a tailoring appointment, says the main benefit of Dipsea’s writing process is “a collection of stories where you see yourself reflected but also feel safe in exploring new genres.”

“There’s nothing like this out there; nothing comes close,” they say of the app.

In addition to erotic storytelling, the app boasts a large collection of sex-education resources from top authorities in the field. There’s a how-to on dirty talk hosted by well-known kink educator Tina Horn, an intro to BDSM by professional dominatrix Yin Q and an orgasmic meditation class led by yoga expert Eva Kaczor.

Similar to my experience, more people are beginning to notice the godsend of Dipsea in quarantine. Company stats show that downloads are on the rise and that March—when most states went into lockdown—was the highest-usage month Dipsea has ever had, with a growth of 44 percent from the previous

month. As of now, the app has more than 400,000 downloads.

The conversation Dipsea has sparked goes beyond just getting off; it could completely change the way our society looks at sex. Sex is often seen as a vice, something that needs to be measured and moderated. That’s why sex toys arrive at our houses in discreet packaging and why we opt for the self-checkout option when buying lubes or condoms at the pharmacy.

Says Gutierrez, “Our job in the past year and a half at Dipsea has been to try to pull sexuality out of vice and push it into wellness. How do we take a space that’s loaded with taboo and bad design and bad expectations and male gaze and directly address all of them? Imagine if we talked about sex not in the same category as guns and nicotine but in the same category as meditation and exercise—as things that make your body feel good.”

Sounds like a no-brainer, right? Unfortunately, this undertaking has faced serious challenges since its inception. Sexuality, especially as it pertains to women’s pleasure, has always been heavily policed, with extra scrutiny thrown in if your sexuality is anything but heteronormative. This is no different in Silicon Valley. In October of last year, Dipsea was kicked out of the Google Play store due to what Dipsea felt was a “fundamental misunderstanding” of what the app is all about. As of February Dipsea is available to Android users once again, but the incident pushed the startup to create a web version of the app that can be used in any browser, making it less reliant on the fickle ecosystem of app stores.

In a more enlightened world, Gutierrez hopes an app like Dipsea would be seen as the hot-and-heavy version of Headspace, the popular mindfulness app.

“Our brains are bombarded in all moments of the day, by all sorts of media, by texts and TikTok and the news,” she says. “A lot of people feel stuck in their heads and disconnected from their bodies. Tapping into desire is actually a really interesting way to remember the connection between your head and your body.”

The biggest sex organ will always be the mind, and Dipsea allows one to engage with it in a captivating new way. By making the journey of self-knowledge and carnal knowledge one and the same, the app is helping to sculpt a future in which we feel more secure with our bodies and, by extension, ourselves. All we have to do is listen.

Our job at Dipsea has been to try to pull sexuality out of vice and push it into wellness. Imagine if we talked about sex not in the same category as guns and nicotine but in the same category as meditation and exercise.”



"To tell the truth, Myra, right now I'm between boyfriends."



"Single!"



buck brown

"I thought you'd never stop fiddling around!"



"Knock it off! Can't you see I'm reading?"





PLAYMATE OF THE YEAR

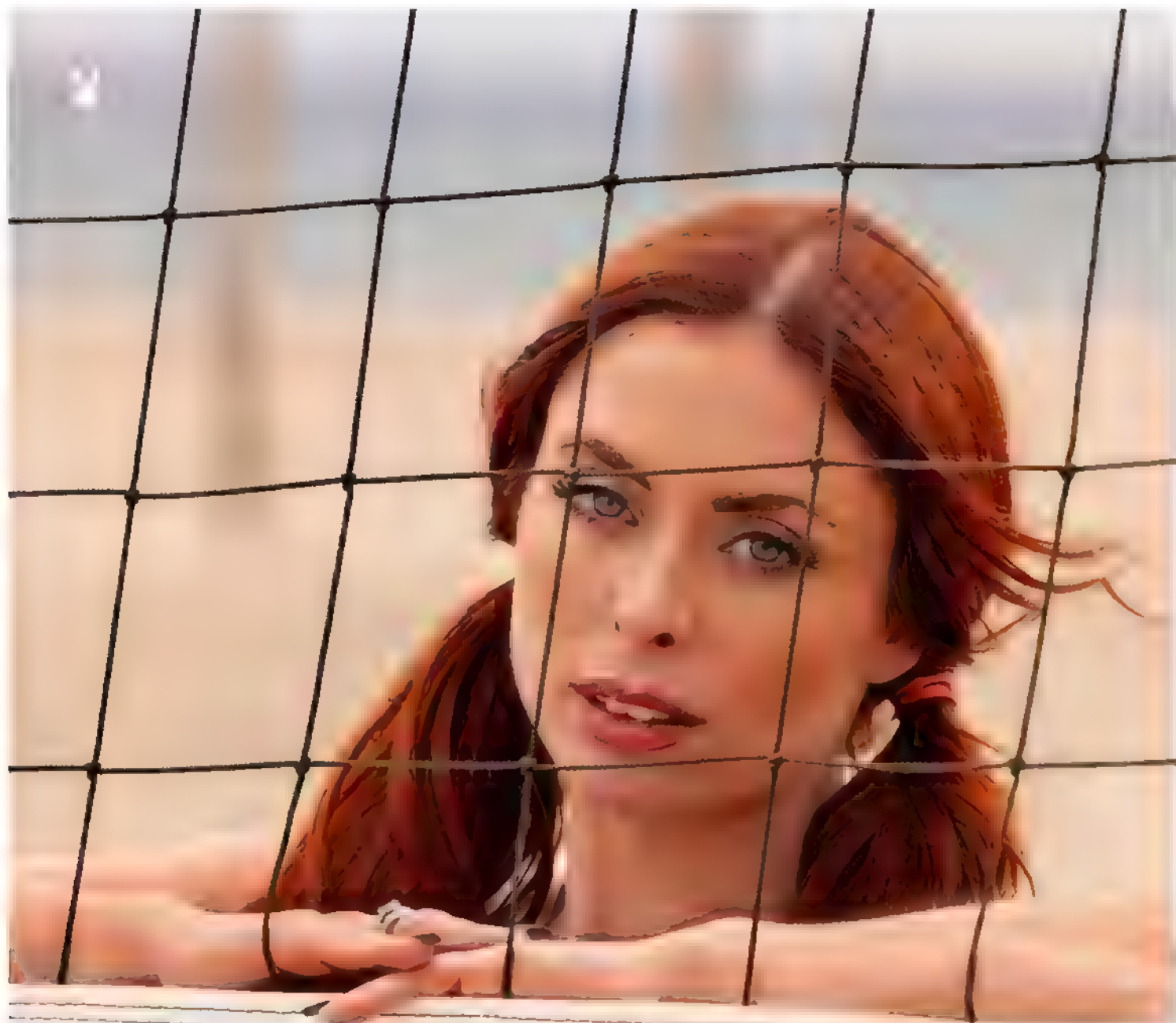
Marley Wallace

OWNING
EVERY
MOMENT

Model @MarleyWallace











PLAYMATE OF THE YEAR





Congratulations on being named Playmate of the Year! What does this title mean to you personally and professionally? It really is the height of my career so far! Definitely the most exciting and inspiring accomplishment to date. Personally, I am just honored to have been awarded Playmate of the Year and professionally it really is a dream come true. Also, thinking about becoming a part of history really makes my heart soar. I will use my reach as a model to help in as many ways as I can that are deep and meaningful to me.

Was becoming a Playmate always a goal of yours, or did it happen unexpectedly? It was unexpected! I love their style and the brand. I remember looking at other models' covers feeling like they were just out of this world gorgeous. I was really growing a lot along the way, from my first Playboy shoot to now. I really see a huge difference. I was so excited to get a message from Playboy's Instagram and they said they were excited to work with me. I was thinking you're excited?? What an honor! I was ecstatic, and it felt like I was dreaming when I read that. Also, I want to compliment Playboy on how incredible it has been to work for your company. Everyone has been so kind and uplifting.

What is your best physical feature? My eyes.

How do you define confidence and sensuality in your own terms? I love being confident and that's something that I believe intertwines with sensuality for me. When I'm feeling beautiful and confident my sensuality just exudes naturally. This question is so complex. I really have to put in work at the gym and doing yoga to feel good in my body first. Then the confidence comes out so much more while I'm working hard for my health. I like to feel like I've earned it so it really aligns with me to feel confident after kicking my ass in a workout. (Or paying my trainer to kick it which has always been so worth it.) Sensuality... I have always been such a sensual person. Even in my home, I love comfort with textures and lighting. It's finding pleasure in so many things in life, even just your home having candles and feeling that ambiance when you're alone. A lot of sensuality I find for myself while getting ready. The hot shower, drying my hair and the feeling of the heat, taking care of my body with scrubs and oil... feeling soft. When I curl my hair and it bounces and bit when I run my fingers

through the soft curls. Taking pleasure in those little moments with myself makes for an amazing foundation of confidence and sensuality. For those that don't feel confident I have had times I struggle with it too! Just keep practicing and finding the things you like about yourself. Focus on your positive qualities! For those who struggle with feeling comfortable in their sensuality a spa day always helps or a makeover, new hairstyle or get your makeup done professionally. I always recommend working out on a regular basis, but a lot of it has to do with your thoughts! So, most importantly be kind to yourself mentally and thankful for your life and body.

What do you think sets you apart from other models and helped you earn this recognition? I love helping other models. Not just with their career but getting into magazines because that was the hardest journey for me. It took 11 years. Also, I do feel like it is more rare to find someone who is genuine in the industry and kind just because there are so many superficial personalities. So, I do feel that sets me apart. I also have met so many kinds of models this year who want to work together, it's not only exciting- it's so awesome when models can uplift each other. I think it is a choice to choose love over jealousy. I also have the kind of persistence and drive that I was never going to give up on my dreams. I would tell myself all the time "My success is inevitable". I also think having talents like ballet, acting, yoga, and art are very valuable to my modeling career. It sets me apart in my modeling because I incorporate my artistic passions in my photoshoots.

Can you share a memorable moment or behind-the-scenes story from your Playboy shoots? One of my favorite shoots was with Sebby Raw, we talked about working together for about 2 years. We shot together in Miami and during the shoot, I just felt so in the zone. Our pictures were amazing and published in last year's July Playboy Australia magazine. I really look up to him and respect him, he is so talented and picky who he works with. Halfway through shooting, he said, "Girl, you really got it!" I really had to be so patient and wait for the stars to align for our shoot. I love the corset I wore, the black lingerie, and shooting out on an incredible rooftop. Follow @Sebby_Raw on Instagram. My other favorite memories were shooting this magazine with Olly Vento. We shot my glamour cover and I absolutely love and adore her! She is just

so fun to work with, absolutely amazing, and such a badass. Not only is she so professional, her work is superb. She is the best of the best in my opinion. She flew to shoot this for me and went so out of her way for me to make this happen. She's very great for posing and just being a hype woman. She always tells me how beautiful and sexy I am. She's just a sweetheart, beautiful on the inside and out. Highly recommend working with her! Follow her on Instagram @OllyVento.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you? I love spinning in my aerial yoga trapeze! It's like a hammock in the way you can relax and have it more for a zen, experience. You can also play in the trapeze in a more yang style which is a great workout. I enjoy both, but I also put my trapeze up accidentally on one mound instead of two, and I spin really fast touching my toe to my head or in the splits upside down. I have been doing it for 8 years and I would love to perform it in a Cirque du Soleil fashion. I feel like a little fairy flying around in a fantasy when I am doing aerial yoga. It's a perfect mix of a physical challenge while fulfilling the artist in me.

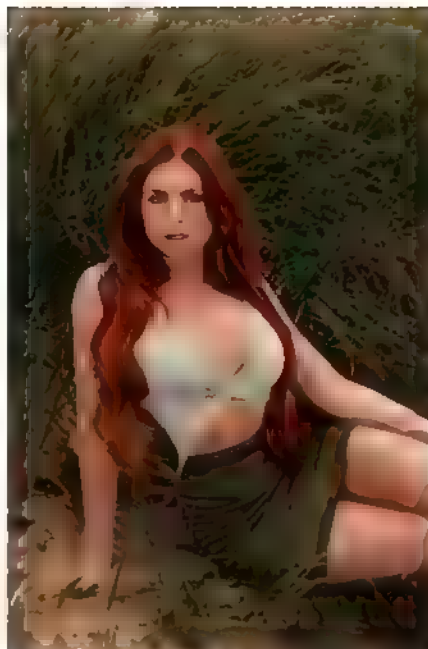
How do your friends and family feel about your Playboy journey? I have so many loving supportive friends and family. I am so incredibly blessed. I really have the coolest family, I truly enjoy spending time with them and my family is huge! We are very close and family has always been the most important to me. I really care that they are supportive, especially my parents. I got teary when they told me they were proud of me. That meant so much to me! Friends have been all over the place, some of them were supportive from the beginning... some only came around after I had a lot of success. Some I think had a hard time believing I could do such "pie in the sky" kind of accomplishments. Overall, I have been very blessed with such a huge outpouring of love over the past couple of years as I come up on this exciting accomplishment. Thank you to a who have been there and loved me! I truly appreciate each and every single one of you.

What challenges have you faced in your modeling career, and how have you overcome them? I have faced so many challenges. Not believing in myself in the beginning was the biggest challenge to get through. Once I did the next challenge was finding other photographers and people in the industry that believed in



me as well. Don't be discouraged if you're having a hard time finding a good support team. Keep looking for your "tribe" so to speak and having genuine intentions in your endeavors. I am an advocate for praying and believing in praying for strength, praying for the right people to come into your life, and praying for you to reach and praying to reach the people that are in need of support. I always encourage others to never give up on their dreams! I think that is so important. Never giving up on a dream you have is so important. I think I was taking the longer harder path with more growth. Really, making a lot of mistakes and learning from them is how my modeling career blossomed. I have a lot of supportive and even more unsupportive people in my life throughout the years. The supportive people loved me regardless of my imperfections and the unsupportive people fueled my competitive side even more. It actually was great to have both, because I am much stronger proving I to myself first that I could do it. Now, I don't notice the unsupportive people as much... they just fade away in the background but you always remember those people that stayed in your corner through the hardest times. I felt like I was crawling on my hands and knees up a muddy mountain for years and years, in modeling and acting. I could see myself helping other models throughout my life to guide them on a safe, successful, and sustainable modeling career. I overcame my challenges (by believing in myself) by working out with a personal trainer. Everything really blew up for me when I aligned myself in a different positive mindset. I think that's absolutely key! Every time I did 15 more reps that I really thought I could it was growing my spirit. Shoutout to my good friend and trainer Justin Sekerak. He has been there and watched me grow from so many challenges, and I am grateful for his help! Having those people in your life who believe in you, in your goals, and are willing to fight for it beside you while cheering you on are so important! Thank you, Justin! Follow him on Instagram @JustinSekerak.

How do you balance the glamorous image with your everyday life? Is there a side of you fans don't often see? I am very down to Earth in everyday life. I love being in nature. Camping and



climbing trees were my favorite as a kid. For loving ballet and my princess side, I also have a very well-rounded balance with a love for fishing, (from my grandparents) and being in the woods. I love being in a pair of jeans and a baggy band T-shirt and I should post more of me like that.

Who inspires you the most, either in modeling or in life in general? My Mom and my older sister were my inspiration. They are so beautiful.

What message do you hope to send to women who see your feature? I hope women feel empowered to be themselves and live free of other's judgment. I believe we have an inner compass in our hearts guiding us, and mine led me to this. Keep following your heart and keep dreaming! Deep down, my mother giving up her dream of being a model and working so hard my whole life was always my biggest inspiration. I also have always really cared that people feel unique, important, worthy of love, and worthy of the life they dream of. That is the message I would love to send to women. Also, for those rare women who have loved and supported me through all the years of my career. The years I struggled, the years I didn't believe I was good enough, I had other people help me grow through those mental limitations. I care about being that catalyst for other women. You have

a purpose, you're beautiful, and you will live your dreams! I believe in you. ALSO! I am 100% about helping others if you ever reach out for help with modeling or acting. I absolutely pay it forward to those kind souls who helped me and changed my life forever. Forever grateful.

Outside of modeling, what are some of your passions or projects you're currently working on? I am working on a new studio that I opened with yoga and massage! I just finished painting last week. This is so dear to my heart and it is just so incredible that both dreams of being Playmate of the Year and opening a healing center are happening at the same time. I also am going back to school at the Academy of Healing Arts and Sciences. I will attain new certifications as a holistic health practitioner, life coach, acupuncture, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. This dream I've had for years and I am finally starting to do more in my healing path which brings me such joy. I start this year! Very happy to announce I am going to do a lot of volunteer work this year teaching yoga and face painting. I am signed up to do face painting with kids at Art Walk at the end of the summer, it's so fun to see the kids so happy.

What's next for you any goals, projects, or dreams you're excited about? A new fitness cover coming out this summer! I am so excited for as well as ballet! Again, yoga teaching and face painting, along with a new academy I am attending.

What advice would you give to aspiring models who dream of working with brands like Playboy? I would say, you absolutely should live your dreams and go for it! It really changed my life and truly has been an honor.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers and where can they find you? Love all my fans so much! Thank you to all of you who compliment or like/love my posts! It really means the world to me and the genuine kindness from other models as well! Look forward to other collaborations with models, a fitness cover, and a ballet cover coming out! Follow my journey on Instagram @MareyWallace.





PLAYMATE OF THE YEAR



Playboy Interview

Scarlett Johansson

A candid conversation with the stratospheric star about motherhood, monogamy and why she keeps playing lethal superwomen

INTERVIEW BY **AMANDA PETRUSICH**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAKE CHESSUM**

The opening sequence of *Lost in Translation*, Sofia Coppola's 2003 film about two spiritually adrift, jet-lagged Americans finding each other in Tokyo, features a sustained shot of Scarlett Johansson's behind, swaddled in a pair of nearly translucent pink underwear, as she lies on a bed, gazing at a window with the curtains drawn

Johansson plays Charlotte, a recent college graduate lamenting the trajectory of

her life from inside an opulent Japanese hotel; the actress was just 17 when she landed the role. Although she had already been working for almost a decade, her quiet, deliberate performance turned her into one of Hollywood's most sought-after actresses, and in the 14 years since *Lost in Translation* was released, she has served as a muse to auteurs including Woody Allen and the Coen brothers and propped up massive

commercial franchises such as *Captain America* and *The Avengers*. Her creative choices have been vast and varied, a mix of blockbusters and art-house experiments—a computer operating system in Spike Jonze's *Her* (a character she gave life to using only that dusky, twilight voice), a 17th century servant to the painter Johannes Vermeer in *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, the girlfriend of a porn addict in *Don Jon*.



Hollywood has a strange relationship to certain libidinous energies, and Johansson is compared often and aptly to Marilyn Monroe. The fact of her body seems to supersede everything else. But Johansson is bored by discussions of her physicality, and while Monroe was never quite able to fully steer her own sexuality, Johansson is remarkably self-possessed. To ask her about her good looks is to watch her grow increasingly disinterested. In the past decade, she's also chosen roles—an unnamed, homicidal alien in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*, *Black Widow*, an unforgiving superspy, in the *Avengers* films, a drug mule who turns superhuman in Luc Besson's *Lucy*—in which her sexuality is weaponized. Men underestimate her and are punished for it.

Her latest part is Major Motoko Kusanagi in a live-action adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii's beloved 1995 manga film. In Oshii's version, the Major is Japanese, and when Johansson's casting was announced, critics immediately cried whitewashing. Johansson was born in New York City, in 1984, to a Jewish mother from the Bronx and a father from Denmark, and while she is quick to acknowledge Hollywood's grim diversity problem, she is hopeful that the film, directed by Rupert Sanders and shot in New Zealand and Hong Kong, will resolve any questions about the Major's actual origins.

The *New Yorker's* Amanda Petrusich first connected with Johansson in a cavernous photo studio on the west side of Manhattan. Two weeks after their initial conversation, Johansson would speak at the Women's March on Washington, voicing her firm support for women's reproductive rights. At one point she addressed the new president directly, saying that her daughter “may potentially not have the right to make choices for her body and her future that your daughter Ivanka has been privileged to have.” But on this blustery afternoon just days into the new year, writer and subject found an overstuffed leather couch, commandeered a plate of chocolate chip cookies and spoke about Johansson's childhood, career and new life as a mother—she has a two-year-old daughter with French advertising executive Romain Dauriac. (They were wed in 2014, three years after the end of Johansson's brief and high-profile marriage to Ryan Reynolds.)

“She's frank and funny and forthright—a kind of tough-talking New York girl,” Petrusich says. “She's also deeply uninterested in bullshit. There's a sense, speaking with her, that you need to be ready to go hard or you'll lose her interest. It immediately made sense to me that Sofia Coppola cast her as a corrective to the bubbly blonde starlet played by Anna Faris in *Lost in Translation*. She's a deep and naturally contemplative person—with a gaze that draws

you in even as it commands you to keep up.”

PLAYBOY: You were born and raised in New York City. What was it like to grow up here?

JOHANSSON: New York was different then. That makes me sound like an old geezer, but the city was much more accessible. My group of friends was really diverse. We all came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and our parents did different things. Some parents were drug dealers, some were working in finance, and we all lived in the same community. While it's still probably the greatest city in the world—I'm biased—I think it used to feel like more was possible here for more people. There's a great leather store down in the West Village that has been there forever. I was there a couple of months ago, and the guy who has been making

sandals since 1967 or whatever is fighting his landlord to stay in that space, because it was once rent stabilized and that doesn't exist anymore. In the next couple of years it will probably turn into some corporate business. It's sad, because that's the heartbeat of New York. That's what drove the city, what made things seem possible.

PLAYBOY: Almost everyone I know who grew up in New York City has this lovely quality—not just being exposed to all the different artists working around you but, inevitably, to all these different ways of being, ways of living, ways of seeing the world.

JOHANSSON: And you can be yourself here, or whatever version of yourself you want to be. That's not possible in a lot of other places. I love the idea of raising my daughter here. She's probably exposed to so many more things just going to the playground than almost any other toddler her age growing up in a lot of other places.

PLAYBOY: You had your daughter in 2015?

JOHANSSON: What year are we in? No, 2014—I can't even

remember [laughs] She's two and a half now.

PLAYBOY: Do you think motherhood has changed you?

JOHANSSON: Oh, it has changed me, yes. Just the process of being pregnant and giving birth was incredibly profound. Also surrendering to the fact that with babies, and particularly infants and toddlers, you have to let go of your expectations and of whatever instincts you have to take control of the situation. Of course, being a mother, you have to make decisions all the time that affect this person who is completely dependent on you, but you also have to surrender to the experience, and that in itself is really liberating. For me, it's the best thing that has ever happened. Ever. Somebody once described it to me as your heart growing this other chamber, and I think that's really profoundly true. Your capacity to love something, at least in my experience, deepens to a whole other space. I think I



was afraid that life would change, and it does; it dramatically changes. But I feel in a lot of ways more myself now than I did before.

PLAYBOY: That's a beautiful way of talking about it.

JOHANSSON: I understand the importance of my own happiness now more than I did before. Because you see how it affects somebody else, and you're kind of like, If I'm not happy, then I can't be in tip-top shape for this other person.

PLAYBOY: This question is asked incessantly of women and very rarely asked of working fathers, but do you feel parenthood has changed the way you approach your work?

JOHANSSON: Where I want to be working is definitely something. That's just a practical part of it, though I'm fortunately at a place in my career, after 20-whatever years, where I can dictate that a little bit. It will probably get more challenging as she gets older, once she's in school and her life is more established in one place. It's a struggle for a lot of people, because we exist in this weird nomadic industry where almost everybody on a crew has a family, and it's hard. It's hard on relationships; it's hard on your partner, your kids, family in general, friends.

PLAYBOY: Has that been a challenge for you?

JOHANSSON: When I was doing *Ghost in the Shell*, I was in New Zealand with our daughter for six months. It was so hard: The distance and the weight of the job itself were really hard on me. It was a big movie with a lot happening. I spent all day fighting people—and literally fighting with myself. I was battling with the character. I remember saying to Rupert Sanders several times, "Can one good thing happen to this character? One great moment?" The answer was no. Spoiler alert: It's a fuckin' dark ride for this person, or cyborg or whatever.

PLAYBOY: There was some controversy about your casting as the Major. She's a character a lot of people presumed would be Japanese and therefore would be played by a Japanese actor. Did those conversations trickle down to you?

JOHANSSON: Totally. I think the conversation about diversity in Hollywood is an important one and one that we should be having. My character has the unique experience of being a person whose human brain has been put into what was essentially a synthetic robotic body. I guess I always thought the character was a universal one, in the sense that she has no identity, and the heart of this story is her search for an identity. I hope that whatever questions people have about my casting in this film will be answered by actually seeing the movie. It's hard to say, because you haven't seen the movie yet, and there's a part of it that I don't want to talk about because it's the turning point of the movie, but I think it answers the question for the audience as to who I am, who I was and what my true identity is, and it has nothing to do with how my character looks or how you see me.

PLAYBOY: On a more personal level, there's also the challenge of disappearing into another person, or disappearing into the project itself, and having to forcibly disconnect from the people around you. It's not a burden that can be shared.

JOHANSSON: Totally, because oftentimes you don't even really

know where within you it's coming from. I think that's part of the beauty of the job. What I'm more and more curious about, and more confident in exploring, are all these weird spaces within ourselves, these little nooks and crannies, things that at one time seemed embarrassing to try. When you realize the freedom you feel when you unlock that, and when you're able to get weird and take up lots of space emotionally and then pull back—if you can do that within a single performance, it's a transformative experience.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your family. Your father is Danish and your mother is from the Bronx. What kind of parents were they?

JOHANSSON: After having two kids and then trying for a third and getting two more—I have a twin brother, and we were the last—I think they surrendered whatever rule book they had been following, if any. That's probably normal. By the time you get to your younger kids, you're more lax, you worry over fewer things, you're more comfortable as a parent. I think my brother and I probably benefited from that in some ways and didn't in others. My mom had moved to California and was kind of remotely there, and my dad was consumed by the responsibility of being at home with us and all that it meant to provide for us. My parents always struggled

financially, so that was a huge burden for him. By the time we were 13, my brother and I were almost raising ourselves. I was still living at home and going to school and stuff, but I was working, and New York is—I was out and about and hanging out and getting into trouble pretty early on. Not too much trouble, thankfully. I self-regulated, but I could have probably gone really far down the rabbit hole had I not always had something guiding me.

PLAYBOY: What do you think that was? Work?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, I had a good work ethic. I had my own sense of self-preservation, and I made it to graduation and got my own place when I was 18.

PLAYBOY: What about dating at that age—anything you know now that you wish you'd known in your early 20s?

JOHANSSON: I never dated anyone, so I'm a bad person to ask for advice. I did go on one blind date, and when I arrived, my date had already taken a shot of tequila in his eye. I didn't even know that was possible. What a turnoff. I would never want to be in my early 20s again, though I did a lot of fun stuff. I wish I knew that everything changes and that nothing is forever—except death. It probably would've freed up a lot of space in my brain.

PLAYBOY: What did your father do for a living?

JOHANSSON: My dad was an architect.

PLAYBOY: And your mom?

JOHANSSON: My mom started managing me when I was about eight or nine. She was kind of overseeing things prior to that, but she really started managing me when I was around that age—or maybe a little bit older, like 12. She did that until I stopped working with her when I was in my early 20s. My mom is very ambitious, and she's also good at multitasking. She has a lot of life force, my mom. I definitely inherited that from her. My dad is more—I don't know, I think my dad in a lot of ways is kind of a dreamer. He's such a creative person, but at times I think he can almost be self-limiting.

"I'm ambitious,
I guess. If I see
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sprint toward it."

Whereas my mom, I think, always saw a bigger picture, and I probably got that from her

PLAYBOY: How was he self-limiting?

JOHANSSON: I think he didn't have as much confidence. He had a complicated relationship with his father. Even though he could dream big, he never had the confidence to push the boundaries. And my mom, when I was growing up, always told me—told all of us, actually—that if we wanted something we had to go and get it for ourselves and that nobody would do it for us. That really stuck with me. Though I think I'm a little bit more forgiving than that. I probably work better in a team than she does, and I really appreciate the collaborative spirit. I think part of that is from working on productions for such a long time and seeing how one hand holds the other and how important it is to have a healthy morale within a group of people in a professional setting. I'm ambitious, I guess. If I see something in the distance and I want it, I'll sprint toward it.

PLAYBOY: I would think there might be something advantageous about coming into your own as an artist relatively early, because there's a self-confidence or self-possession we all have as children that just gets chipped away the longer you exist in the world.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, I think that's interesting. You go to high school and then you go to college and then you're about to graduate and you go, "Well, I don't want to do this." And then you're interning somewhere, and it's not something you really want to do. You don't really have any work experience, you haven't had this kind of time in the field. And then you go back to graduate school for something else, because you realize that you need a master's degree to do whatever it is you decided you want to do, and then, you know, people get married and have kids, and life just takes a different path. I think when you work from a young age, you have time to hone—craft is such a crappy word, but it's true. You hone a craft and things get pared away. You cut the fat away earlier on, and you're more focused on what is within that's actually driving you.

PLAYBOY: It's such a gift to know what you want.

JOHANSSON: It's true. Otherwise, you get suffocated by the possibilities. I think that's what happens. Everything is possible, especially in this country. We're so spoiled that way—sometimes too much is possible, and that's why people panic. They don't want to fail at anything, so they just stop. They stop reaching.

PLAYBOY: That's a very American idea, the fear of failure. We prize success above all else. There's no power in admitting fault or failure or uncertainty.

JOHANSSON: It's something Barack Obama has—humility. It's such a lovely quality. There are a lot of things about him that will be missed, but humility is such an important part of being successful at what you do.

PLAYBOY: And being able to learn.

JOHANSSON: I actually think it will become very apparent that

a leader cannot be successful if they don't have that—if they're not able to be vulnerable, curious, compassionate, to have that kind of humility. I don't think you can lead in any field without having those qualities. That's what makes a leader, I think: the ability to learn from mistakes and to have compassion for your fellow man.

PLAYBOY: You campaigned for Barack Obama twice and supported Hillary Clinton in the recent election. How have you been coping with recent events?

JOHANSSON: You know, it's funny. I had dinner with Woody Allen right after the election, so it was in November. We were both like, "Okay, the election. That's our topic before we get deep into what the meaning of life is." And I said, "Please don't tell me you're one of those people who was like, 'I told you so.' Please don't tell me that." And he was like, "Honestly, I was shocked. I would have thought that he would not have won one state." And I thought, Okay, well, if Woody felt that way, it makes me feel better about being as ignorant as I was, because I literally—I mean, it was a complete and utter shock. I had a very strange experience

voting. I took my kid with me, and I was like, "Kid, we got a female president, which is pretty exciting. And it's Hillary Clinton, that's also cool, and we're good." Then I got on a plane to Hong Kong, which is a 16-hour flight. I had two glasses of wine and passed out. I woke up 10 hours later, and the stewardess was like, "Excuse me, Miss, would you like to know the election results?" I looked at her and said, "Well, I know it's—okay, what? Give me the news. Let me have it. What is it? I think I know it's Clinton." And she was like, "No, it's actually Trump." I thought, This is a Twilight Zone episode.

PLAYBOY: You thought she was kidding.

JOHANSSON: I mean, I'm shutting through the air at 30,000 feet. The whole cabin is dark, my brother is passed out, and I tap him on the shoulder—he was a field or-

ganizer for Obama, he's very political—and I say, "Hunter, wake up, wake up!" He was like, "What?" I said, "Trump won." He was like, "Oh, stop it." God, he got so drunk when we landed in Hong Kong. This morning I was listening to NPR, and I have these moments when it still hits me, the weight of it.

PLAYBOY: Tell me about your experience at the Women's March on Washington.

JOHANSSON: As you know, I'm not one to overshare, but I felt very driven to say what I had to say. It was both a grounding experience and an out-of-body one. Paradoxical, I guess. I always took Planned Parenthood for granted growing up. That's how it should be, right? We are talking about normalizing what is by definition a normal thing: the accessibility of women's health care. Everyone with a vagina needs it. Why are we still having these conversations so many years after we, as women, were supposedly "liberated"? I'm over it.

PLAYBOY: Are there things you do to manage feelings of hopelessness or fear?

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tion a normal thing:
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a vagina needs it.

JOHANSSON: Well, one thing—you just can't be complacent. I think it's hard because people have been inactive for such a long time, and we don't have a draft. Not that I'm advocating for that, but if there were some kind of mandatory service, I think it would be a completely different political climate. People would be much more proactive—not just opinionated but proactive. It's hard to mobilize people when they don't feel—I mean, look at this past election: Nobody voted. There was a record low turnout. I blame the media for a lot of that too. Early polling results and that stuff should just be banned. I think people just got complacent. They were like, "Who cares?"

PLAYBOY: That leads me to a tangent about music. You're a singer as well as an actor, and you've made two records. In 2008 you released *Anywhere I Lay My Head*, a collection of covers of Tom Waits songs. As we're speaking of America writ large, it occurs to me that Waits is one of our best representative voices—on his records he becomes a vital, exciting and endearing embodiment of this place. Tell me about your relationship to his work.

JOHANSSON: He's a true poet. And he's an artist in that most delicious way, where his self-expression gives us a place to be reflective. Rhino came to me to do an album. I mean, who has that opportunity? It was amazing. I was overwhelmed. I thought, Maybe I'll do classics, maybe I'll do Cole Porter songs. Then I was like, I really want to do that duet Tom Waits does with Bette Midler called "I Never Talk to Strangers." And then I thought, Maybe I'll just reimagine Tom Waits songs and see where that leads me. I tried doing it with various producers, and it just was not working. That's when I got, very fatefully, to Dave Sitek from TV on the Radio. He had this Tinkerbell-cough-syrup idea for the album, and so we just ran with it. Meeting Dave was life-changing because he became a really important figure in my life and a dear, dear friend. And going to Louisiana to record was an absolutely epic experience. I was falling in love with my first husband at the time. It was just a very romantic and really liberating time. It was great.

PLAYBOY: That sounds incredible.

JOHANSSON: It was wonderful.

PLAYBOY: Another interesting thing about Waits's work is that so much of it is about his particular, singular performance of those songs. But because of that, I feel there's a lot of meat left on the bone, in a way, for a different singer to come in and totally reimagine them.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, it's true. It's funny because if you try to recreate the song as Waits did it, you realize he actually has a very classical approach. I'm not talking about the really experimental stuff that he does, but the instrumental parts of his songs can be very sentimental. It's his voice that gives them such depth.

PLAYBOY: You and Dave got in a car and drove together from California to Louisiana.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, it was crazy, because we didn't know each other at all, and we figured we would get to know each other on this road trip. I think I drove.

PLAYBOY: That's so high-stakes!

JOHANSSON: I remember picking him up in Silver Lake or whatever, and he had seven cigarettes in each hand, a cup of black coffee and a bunch of weird instruments I had never heard of, and we just loaded up the trunk and here we go. We drove into the desert and smoked a bunch of pot and got weird. We just sat on the hood of the car and stared into the sunset.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned Waits being one of our great poets. Were you pleased when Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for lit-

erature?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, that was cool. I love that he didn't show up too. That's very Dylanesque. Dylan is someone you can revisit at different times in your life and his songs mean something different to you at each stage. He's a wonderful artist and poet and a mysterious magician.

PLAYBOY: You starred in one of his music videos.

JOHANSSON: My friend Bennett Miller was asked to direct a video for him. I was going to do it with Dylan, and then he didn't want to be in the video, so we just kind of did our own thing. About two years later, I went to see Dylan for the first time. I saw him backstage, and he said something to me like "Oh yeah, thanks for the video you did." I expected when we did the video that he would come at us, that I would hear from him—no, not at all. He just kind of remembered it on the fly, like, Oh yeah, you did that video for me. It was my pleasure, Mr. Dylan. My friend told me this hysterical story about how a friend of theirs, a music producer, was like, "I'm bringing a friend to dinner," and it was Dylan, which is crazy. Dylan was wearing a hoodie, and he had pulled the string so only his eyes and nose were showing. And he sat through the entire dinner like that. He kept having to pull his hoodie down so he could shove forkfuls of food into his mouth.

PLAYBOY: God bless him. Your second record, *Break Up*, was a collaboration with Pete Yorn, who has said that he was inspired by Serge Gainsbourg's recordings with Brigitte Bardot. Is the duet format something that appeals to you?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, duets are great. When I was a kid I listened to Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Dean Martin with various singers, the Andrews Sisters. I think I particularly like to hear a male and a female voice together. Pete was like, "Hey, want to make an album?" I think he was in a dark place, or a transitional place in his life, and he had a dream that we made an album together, so he texted me when he came out of his fever dream, and that's how we decided to make it.

PLAYBOY: The record does have a dreamy quality—there's an ache to it. Do you remember your dreams?

JOHANSSON: I do, yeah.

PLAYBOY: Any recurring anxiety dreams?

JOHANSSON: I only have anxiety dreams! I once told my mother that and she cried. I have a lot of dreams about houses—beautiful, ancient houses filled with gardens and hanging vines that I at one time had the opportunity to live in but sold. Whatever, I'm sure the heating bills would have been outrageous.

PLAYBOY: I think part of getting older is reckoning with that idea that there's so much we don't know and might never know about ourselves. Dreams are the most immediate way to glimpse those weird, vast expanses of your subconscious that you can't otherwise access.

JOHANSSON: It's true. Of course, because you have all these barriers that shut you down from—I mean, I think it's probably a survival thing that you go about your day and remember glimpses of dreams that you've had. I think examining your dreams can really help you to be more present in your waking life, because then you know better what's going on with you.

PLAYBOY: Every once in a while someone will do you a great service by saying something revelatory to you, about you—and of course you're like, "Fuck you, you don't know me." Then you go home and think about it and you're like, Oh my God, they're exactly right.

JOHANSSON: I was listening to this TED Talk about relation



ships, and the person who was giving the talk was saying that in moments when you're starting a new relationship and your friends and family say, "No, this is a red flag. This person is not for you"—why do we ignore those people who know us so well in the moments that we don't? And then we distance ourselves from them because we're embarrassed or whatever. It's interesting how sometimes all you need is your good friend to tell you that you're not acting like yourself. Or that they see something in front of you that is not beneficial for you or true to who you actually are. I don't know. It's so easy to just go, "No, I don't want to hear that."

PLAYBOY: Well, love is so deeply intoxicating at first. You're just out of your mind.

JOHANSSON: Of course

PLAYBOY: No one can tell you anything.

JOHANSSON: And the part of your brain that functions then is a dysfunctional part—it's not the rational side of your brain. It's the addictive part of your brain that fires up when you have those first feelings of love, and it's so good.

PLAYBOY: You've said that you aren't sure humans are designed to be monogamous.

JOHANSSON: Well, with every gain there's a loss, right? So that's a loss. You have to choose a path. I think the idea of marriage is very romantic; it's a beautiful idea, and the practice of it can be a very beautiful thing. I don't think it's natural to be a monogamous person. I might be skewered for that, but I think it's work. It's a lot of work. And the fact that it is such work for so many people—for everyone—the fact of that proves that it is not a natural thing. It's something I have a lot of respect for and have participated in, but I think it definitely goes against some instinct to look beyond.

PLAYBOY: And of course many marriages don't work out.

JOHANSSON: I think marriage initially involves a lot of people who have nothing to do with your relationship, because it's a legally binding contract, and that has a weight to it. Being married is different than not being married, and anybody who tells you that it's the same is lying. It changes things. I have friends who were together for 10 years and then decided to get married, and I'll ask them on their wedding day or right after if it's different, and it always is. It is. It's a beautiful responsibility, but it's a responsibility.

PLAYBOY: You were married for the second time in 2014. Did you wake up the next morning and feel different?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, definitely. It felt different. I had a really young baby at the time, so that also—our family dynamic was just different. I don't know. Whatever that is, the thing you can't fully put words to, it changed.

PLAYBOY: And it felt different from your prior marriage too?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, of course. I had a baby, and also my husband was coming from another country and becoming a citizen of this country. It was a huge transition for both of us, and certainly for him—moving here, committing to the States. But I think my

husband has embraced America, and New York in particular, in this really endearing way. He was making meatballs the other night, actually. I wasn't home. I was away, and he sent me a picture. He was like, "I'm a real New Yorker, and I love *The Sopranos*!" I was just, "You go, babe."

PLAYBOY: Are you based in New York now, or are you still moving back and forth between here and Paris?

JOHANSSON: We still mix it up. My job takes me all over the place, so I don't even know where I live, but I guess now we're kind of committed to living here because with our daughter we have to commute to someplace. She'll be in school in a hot minute. The time passes like crazy.

PLAYBOY: What do you think you'd be doing if you weren't acting?

JOHANSSON: Oh gosh, I don't know. I probably would have gone into some kind of medical profession. I'd be rooting around in somebody else's I'm interested in people.

PLAYBOY: They're such different disciplines, but they both rely on a kind of intuition.

JOHANSSON: I could have been a dermatologist. I would have actually loved being a dermatologist. That's a dream job. All my friends are like, "What is this weird thing on me?" And I'm like, "Let me see it!" But I don't think I could do seven years of schooling.

PLAYBOY: I'm also not sure that Hollywood would let you go so easily.

JOHANSSON: Oh, I don't know. There's always someone else to fill the void.

PLAYBOY: I read recently that you were the highest-grossing actor of 2016.

JOHANSSON: I make a lot of movies that have a huge built-in audience, and that drives a lot of it. But it's been a very productive few years.

PLAYBOY: Surveying your body of work, there's an interesting mix of independent, idiosyncratic films and

then these intensely commercial franchise movies. Do you try to keep those things in balance?

JOHANSSON: I always hoped to have that balance, and I've finally achieved it. I loved what Jon Favreau did with *Iron Man*, how he worked with actors like Robert Downey, who I've loved for such a long time. I'm not normally a comic book fan. I liked the Tim Burton *Batman* movies, but it's not my genre. Yet Favreau seemed to find this balance that you're talking about—an independent creative spirit with the budget of something so ambitious. It was unprecedented. It was a new way of telling that story. And it obviously rang true, because then DC and studios like Warner Bros. started doing it too. Look at the *Suicide Squad* cast—we've seen Will Smith in these blockbusters, but casting somebody like Jared Leto as the Joker? It's a really welcome trend. I think.

PLAYBOY: Do you read reviews of your films or interviews with you in magazines?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, I do. I do read reviews and interviews. I

"I don't think it's natural to be a monogamous person. I might be skewered for that, but I think it's work."

don't search high and low for reviews, but The New York Times, the trades—I'm curious about that stuff. It's helpful, and I like to participate in the process that way. I will always have my own opinion about something that I'm doing, not necessarily of my own performance but of the film in general. And it's probably similar to whatever your response was at the time! Good or bad. I'm like, "Yup, I didn't expect it to suck either." There have been very few times when I did something I loved and nobody else liked it. Most of the time I'm like, "Yeah ..."

PLAYBOY: Filmmaking is so collaborative. There are so many moving parts, and you're often just one of them. I imagine it must be heartbreaking when you see something you've made—

JOHANSSON: And it didn't turn out how you wanted.

PLAYBOY: And who knows whose fault it was?

JOHANSSON: I know whose fault it was! Of course, oh my God. Other times I've made movies that were really successful and I had no idea why. There are some nice surprises. For instance, when we made *Lost in Translation*, nobody could really see what Sofia Coppola's vision would be. We were making it in this weird fever of jet lag, in this new environment, and we shot it in 27 days. Lance Acord, our director of photography, may have been one of the only ones who could see what we were capturing. When I read the script, I didn't know, I was just kind of doing my thing with Bill Murray, just experiencing what the character was experiencing. And then it came out and it resonated with so many people. I never could have predicted that.

PLAYBOY: You were just 17 when you were cast in that movie. What's your experience of watching it now?

JOHANSSON: I haven't seen it in so long. I would probably think, Oh my God, I'm so young.

PLAYBOY: Your character, Charlotte, is 25 in the film and searching.

JOHANSSON: I had been working for almost a decade at that time. I was in a much older circle of friends and colleagues. That sort of yearning for purpose—I had maybe a greater understanding of what that felt like than other high school seniors.

PLAYBOY: Robert Redford, who directed you in *The Horse Whisperer*, described you as "13 going on 30." Have you always been an old soul?

JOHANSSON: I don't know. Like I said, I was taking care of my-

self from when I was pretty young. In a lot of ways I had to be responsible for myself.

PLAYBOY: Anthony Lane, who is a very esteemed film critic, wrote a profile of you that readers thought was so fawning it spawned several negative response pieces. I'm not suggesting this is the case with Lane, who I think is an intelligent and thoughtful writer, but there's certainly a history of male magazine reporters approaching beautiful young starlets in ways that feel limiting, if not absurd.

JOHANSSON: Women do it too, though. I've also experienced that with female journalists. I think they project. They have this strange way of comparing themselves to this idea of you. I'll read

articles written by women about other women in which they say, "That perfect blow-out reminded me of the fact that I hadn't showered in four days," or whatever. It's not only hollow, it's uninteresting. Maybe it's just more of a failure in approach—instead of getting to the heart of someone, what drives them creatively, you just scratch the surface. I also find interviews a lot of the time to be very boring. Not this interview; this interview is not boring, but you're also lovely to talk to. When interviewers are self-deprecating, it becomes this weird—I don't know, it can be exhausting at times.

PLAYBOY: People do sometimes write about you as if you've just drifted down in a beam of light.

JOHANSSON: Nice!

PLAYBOY: It must be hard to bear the weight of those projections.

JOHANSSON: I think it's actually ridiculous. It's absurd. Also, I have a lot of experiences where I'm like, "I can't believe this is happening to me." I'm still surprised by my job and the places it carries me. But my day-to-day life is

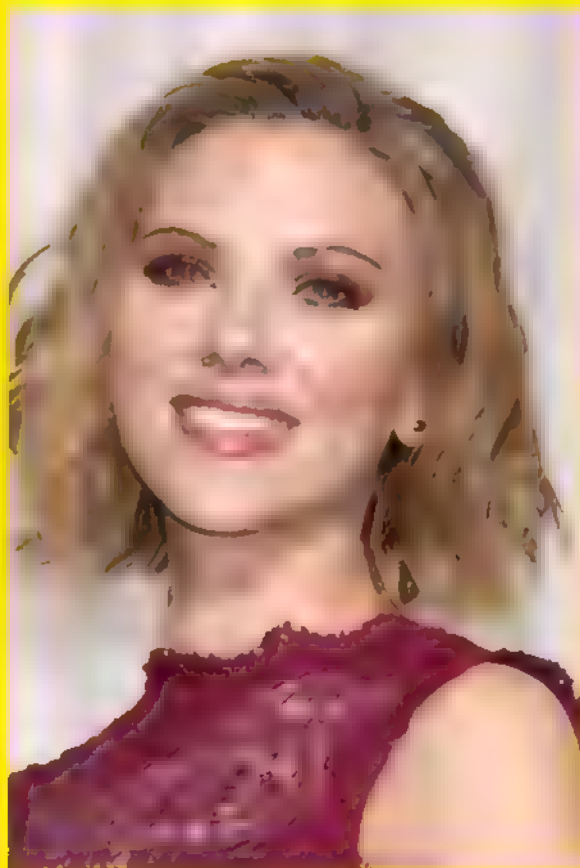
a regular routine.

PLAYBOY: Not to sound dystopian or paranoid, but it increasingly feels as though in the future privacy will be our currency. We're all being rather cavalier about it right now—I'm being tracked all the time by this thing in my pocket, I'm giving all my information to corporations, and it's fine.

JOHANSSON: I couldn't agree with you more, having experienced that.

PLAYBOY: You had your e-mail hacked in 2011.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, that was crazy. It made me realize how vulnerable anyone is to that. The person who hacked my e-mail did



the same thing to 50 other people in the public eye and also to his ex-girlfriends—it could happen to anybody. And of course we're so cavalier about that. People are like, "Oh, who cares about me." But you're just as vulnerable.

PLAYBOY: I think almost anyone's e-mail would betray some bad behavior

JOHANSSON: Well, it's just your personal life. Even if it's letters you wrote to your best friend, your sister, whatever, it's your personal stuff. It's like a journal. It's pretty crazy.

PLAYBOY: You've stayed off social media

JOHANSSON: I just never got on that bandwagon. I don't even call people back. I don't even check my voice mail. It's not in my nature. I get it; it's a great tool for a lot of companies, a lot of causes. I don't know. I haven't missed it in my life at all.

PLAYBOY: Why open that door?

JOHANSSON: I don't have space for it in my life. If I had any kind of social media account, I would have to rely on somebody else to run it, and that seems like a ridiculous extra thing I don't need or want. I already read too much news on my phone. A couple of days ago my phone died, and I didn't have a phone for 20 hours, and it was wonderful. I was so thrilled. It may have been the first time in my life I wasn't panicked to not have my phone. I was just like, "This is great!" I had my kid with me. I was like, "I don't need anything. I got my kid, I'm good."

PLAYBOY: I suspect you were perhaps at the very tail end of the last generation of actresses who came of age professionally somewhat free of the scrutiny under which young women are held now.

JOHANSSON: Yes, I was. You see some young actors performing, and you can tell that they're aware of how they're supposed

to be, how the public sees them and what kind of persona they're supposed to convey. And that is unfortunate.

PLAYBOY: Tell me a little about your process as you prepare for a new role.

JOHANSSON: I start by trying to find some physicality to the character that I can hold and return to. Whether that's a self-consciousness, like a person who is worried about aging, or maybe it's somebody who, like the Major, has no sense of her own. She knows her physical body, but she has no care or awareness of her self.

PLAYBOY: That's also true of the women you play in *Under the Skin* and *Her*. Each of those characters is essentially just a disembodied consciousness.

JOHANSSON: With *Her* I actually had a hyper-awareness of myself because I was stuck in a black box. It's just my voice, and so you become hyperaware of certain habits. Doing the sex scene with Joaquin was an exercise in letting go.

PLAYBOY: Was it embarrassing?

JOHANSSON: I think he was really uncomfortable at first. He was so agitated, and it was really interesting to see him. It was probably easier for me because I had been in a black box for such a long time that I was like, "Bring it. I'm warmed up. Come on, let's get weird." In a black box you get this sense that nobody can see you, so you can be whomever you want. You can be yourself. But it was interesting to see how he reacted to it. He came around,

though, and we did it—literally, we did it. But the physicality is where I start, just being aware of how this story, these lines, what does it feel like in me, what does it feel like in my body, and then why am I having this physical instinct to be close with somebody or apart from them or self-conscious about this thing or that. In the case of *Under the Skin*, how can I be completely free of any of these and just be purely instinctive and animal? Or in *Ghost in the Shell*, I don't have any of these physical tics, these things that make us human. I'm devoid of those things, so what does that leave me with? What does this body feel like that's not my own? There was a separation between her mind and her body, so she had to think and then act on it. These kinds of things get me started. And then of course there's research. Even when I was playing Janet Leigh in *Hitchcock*, you just think about how she stands, and what it says about her strength, this fiery, driven person. The physicality is where it starts, and then it grows from there.

PLAYBOY: For me, one of the reasons you and Bill Murray are

so satisfying to watch in *Lost in Translation* is because you share a subtle approach to the material. I think the word that gets used is underreactive. You don't seem afraid of silence or a blank stare.

JOHANSSON: I think it's really important for me to take time. The audience will stay with you. They'll ride the wave with you. That's the best part about doing live theater—having the reaction, the feedback from the audience, because it's so informative. It's just absolute magic when the audience and you are riding the same wave.

PLAYBOY: You starred in the Broadway revivals of Arthur Miller's *A View From the Bridge* and Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, both such rich and complicated plays. Growing up

"I'll read articles written by women about other women in which they say, 'That perfect blow-out reminded me of the fact that I hadn't showered in four days,' or whatever. It's not only hollow, it's uninteresting."





in New York, was being on Broadway an early dream of yours?

JOHANSSON: That was my absolute dream. That's what drove me to acting. I wanted to do theater and be on Broadway. I wanted desperately to be in theater when I was eight. I wanted to be in musical theater, which I would never do now, ever. If I had to sing and dance in front of people, I would absolutely melt, fail miserably. But you have so many chances to get it right. You can get really weird, and you know that this is the only audience that will see it.

PLAYBOY: You've played so many characters who start out one way—unfeeling, unknowing—and grow into something or someone else via their interactions with others or their observations of the world. I'm sure you're seeing some version of this unfold for your daughter now too—a broadening. Do you think we're all constantly changing into new iterations of ourselves?

JOHANSSON: I don't know. It might be interesting to play somebody who stays stuck. I don't know if it would be interesting to watch. Maybe it is. There's something really powerful about somebody who can't change themselves or doesn't want to change themselves. If you watch something like *Barry Lyndon* or think of a character like *Dorian Gray*, there's something really amazing about those characters. To watch the demise of somebody who doesn't want to or is incapable of changing. I'd like to get there, because it probably would help me understand a lot of people in my life. Maybe that will be the next thing for me. But up until this point, I think I've been trying to wrap my head around metamorphosis. Maybe now I've gotten to a stage where I can finally play that person who cannot change.

PLAYBOY: It seems there's a lot of possibility there for an actor.

JOHANSSON: It's so delicious, because I'm innately somebody who's curious about myself and trying to figure it out. My therapist would say, "Well, you make the same mistakes, so don't make them anymore." "I don't want to make them anymore!" But in life we make the same mistakes again and again, and —

PLAYBOY: And then one day you don't?

JOHANSSON: And then you don't. That's the hope. But it's so interesting when a person keeps making the same mistake or is unwilling to change.

PLAYBOY: I believe I know some of those people intimately.

JOHANSSON: Oh, I thought I dated all of them! Were there any left for you?

"I have a lot of experiences where I'm like, 'I can't believe this is happening to me.' I'm still surprised by my job and the places it carries me."







LEADING
THE WAY

Anna
Vostretsova







**Congratulations on your Playboy feature!**

How do you feel? Thank you so much! Honestly, I feel incredibly grateful, happy, and just... glowing from the inside out. This moment feels like a dream come true, and I'm so honored to be part of something so iconic. I've always believed that light attracts light and I hope my energy shines through these photos and brings a little joy to everyone who sees them. It's not just about beauty, it's about soul, spark, and sharing a little magic with the world.

What is your best physical feature? I'd say my best physical feature is my body's incredible flexibility. It's not just about appearance - it's about expression. I can do all types of splits and perform acrobatic moves with strength and grace. My body tells stories through movement, and I love that it allows me to push limits while staying deeply connected to my feminine energy.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you? I meditate in the mornings... and fantasize like a sinner by night. Balance, baby. Namasté and naughty all in one body.

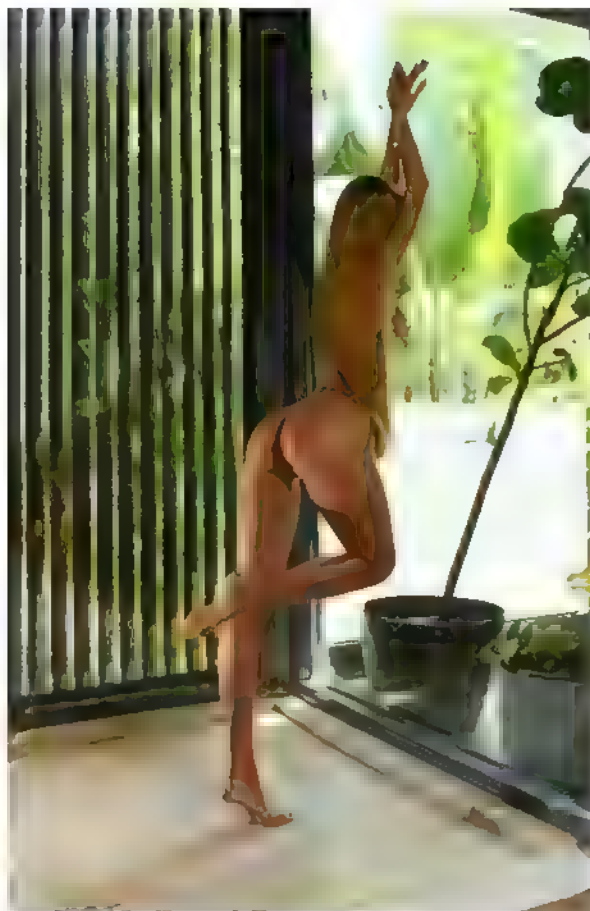
Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? Hmm, ten years, that's a long chapter in anyone's story. And I believe in shaping the future through what I do now. When it comes to my body and beauty - I'm already laying the foundation today. I want to be even more graceful, more flexible, more connected to what my body is capable of. Right now I study dance, tantra, yoga, and meditation - not just as practices, but as a way of life. They're teaching me how to listen to myself, and how to unlock new levels of strength and softness at the same time. And I know that in ten years, my body will reflect this deep relationship: stronger, more alive, and more expressive than ever before. On a deeper note, I'm currently finishing my studies in psychology. I dream of building a project that supports women not just physically, but emotionally and mentally. A space where they can feel seen, supported, and inspired to grow. I want to help women discover their own beauty and power and to be part of that journey with them, from both sides of the lens. And yes - I do see myself in a strong, lasting relationship. Right now, my energy is focused on growth, healing, and building something meaningful. But in ten years, I imagine sharing my life and my vision with someone who truly understands the language of depth, passion, and presence. To me, the future is about balance - between self-expression and connection, ambition and intimacy. Between the art I create and the love I live.



Outside of modeling, what are some of your passions or projects you're currently working on? Let's just say I'm constantly exploring just how far my body can bend... and how deep my mind can go. Outside of modeling, I'm deeply immersed in the world of movement. I practice dance, yoga, and stretching. I'm always learning new acrobatic movements and deepening my practice in tantra. It's my way of staying connected to my body's energy, intuition, and sensuality. Flexibility isn't just physical for me - it's a metaphor for how I move through life: fluid, playful, and always evolving. I'm also studying psychology, and that journey has inspired me to create something bigger: a future project where women can reconnect with their power, vulnerability, and worth. A space that blends bodywork, emotional healing, and soul where self-love isn't just a hashtag, but a daily ritual. And, of course, I love sharing bits of this journey online. My blog, TikTok, and Instagram are

places where I explore beauty, femininity, and transformation with a touch of mischief and sometimes, a lot of heart. A so working on a little secret project... think sensuality meets self-love. You'll want in.

Who inspires you the most, either in modeling or in life in general? Oh, what a wonderful question! Thank you. Honestly, I fall in love with women all the time. There's so much beauty in the way women exist, the way we move, love, rise, and support one another in the world of modeling, I deeply admire women like Gisele Bündchen, Naomi Campbell, and Irina Shayk. Not just for their outer beauty, but for the presence they bring into a room. They radiate confidence, authenticity, and depth, and that, to me, is what makes someone truly unforgettable. But it's not just icons who inspire me. I'm constantly moved by the women around me by every day goddesses who carry so much light without even



realizing it. More than anything, it's my closest circle that sets my inner world on fire. One of those women is my dear friend Y. We've shared so much over the years that people often say we look like twins not just in appearance, but in energy, gestures, and even the rhythm of our voices. It's true what they say: when you spend enough time with someone your soul connects to, you begin to mirror each other. So now I have a twin sister, yes-yes. She inspires me with her kindness, her depth, her humor, and the way she always stays true to herself. She's not just a friend; she's someone I truly admire and love deeply. You can find glimpses of our friendship, our stories, and our shared magic on my Instagram. Because sometimes, the greatest muses are not on billboards; they're right beside you, holding your hand through life.

What message do you hope to send to women who see your feature? To every woman reading this, wear what makes you

feel dangerous. Think what you want and let them guess. Confidence is quiet. Sensuality is intentional. And you're allowed to take up space and steal breaths. Confidence looks good on a woman, especially when she's wearing nothing else. And to the men reading this... Let's just say if you feel a little dizzy reading my words, imagine what happens when I walk into the room.

How do you define confidence and sensuality in your own terms? Confidence is when I say "Oops"... and don't mean it. Sensuality is when they can't tell if I'm serious but hope I am.

What has been the biggest lesson you've learned since entering the modeling industry? I've learned that the camera doesn't lie, but it does flirt. And if you flirt back just right... it falls in love with you.

Do you like taking vacations? Where is your favorite place you have been and where would you like to visit next? Va-

cations? Baby, I am the vacation. But okay! I love any place with white sheets, blue water, and no schedule. Next stop? Maybe Tokyo... or the arms of someone who can keep up.

Besides modeling, what keeps you busy? Well... keeping life deliciously interesting is a full-time job, isn't it? When I'm not in front of the camera, I'm somewhere barefoot dancing, stretching, meditating, or exploring some new way to fall in love with my body and mind all over again. Tantra, yoga, a little psychology, a little magic... I like to keep things soft on the outside and deep on the inside.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Red lipstick. Because even if I'm talking to coconuts, I'm doing it in style. Also, in case I need to kiss a pirate.

What's next for you any goals, projects, or dreams you're excited about? Oh, so many delicious things. But I like to keep a little mystery, don't you? Let's just say I'm working on something that blends psychology, sensuality, and a little bit of trouble. Something for women... but have a feeling men will be very curious too. I'm also building a space where confidence wears silk, and self-love comes with a wink. Will there be dancing? Always. Stretching? Naturally. A little chaos? If I'm in the room, probably. I'm working on a project that blends sensuality, self-love, and just enough mystery to keep you guessing. Think psychology meets silk sheets. And yes, you're welcome to wonder what that means.

What advice would you give to aspiring models? Say yes. Say yes to opportunities, even the small ones.







Michael Jordan

“

You can call Charles Barkley a great second place finisher.”

Last year Michael Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to their fourth NBA title in six years (They lost when he played baseball.) He won his eighth scoring title and his fourth MVP award. Earth's most famous jock also starred in Space Jam, becoming the only human to work with both Bugs Bunny and Dennis Rodman. He did it with ease and antigrav grace, as usual. For Jordan, superhuman feats are no sweat. So why does he need Michael Jordan cologne?

We sent Contributing Editor Kevin Cook to the Rodeo Drive suites of fragrancier Bijan to ask.

"I didn't smell anything, but the air did change when Jordan entered the room. He is regal. Pleasant and sometimes funny, too, but his presence has a bouquet of magnificence. He is in charge of every detail. At one point Bijan barged in; the cologne pooh-bah was worried about a photo of Jordan for an ad campaign.

p'What's missing?" Jordan asked.

p'Your energy, your statement of you," said Bijan. p'Michael studied the photo for about two seconds. "It's fine," he said. End of crisis.

"I couldn't help noticing the official Michael Jordan soap displayed beside his cologne. It was thick as a brick and almost as long."

Q1: Why is your soap so big?

JORDAN: Look at my hand. It's huge, isn't it? So I need a big bar of soap. And I'm not the only one—my teammates need something big to wash their butts with.

Q2: Do you intend to freshen up the NBA's locker rooms?

JORDAN: Starting with my team. I think Scottie Pippen wears Dunhill, but I'll change him over. If I can just get Scottie to try Michael Jordan cologne, he'll come around. Dennis Rodman? I'll give him some, but I don't think he'll use it.

Q3: Is Dennis Rodman more of a Chanel guy?

JORDAN: Dennis is totally different. I never question his attire or his hygiene. I don't infringe on him. He has ways of expressing himself that I don't agree with, but that's Dennis, and we let it go. I would be opposed to seeing him in makeup or a dress on the basketball court. And as far as him playing naked, I just hope I'm not on the court.

Q4: Tell us your fragrance history. Did you ever use Hai Karate?

JORDAN: Sure. I went through Old Spice, Hai Karate—but what I really remember is the smelly stuff my father used to wear, English Leather. The fatherly cologne, yeah, with that wooden top. Sneaking some of his English Leather, spraying it on myself, I'll never forget that.

Q5: Fans love Bugs Bunny, your Space Jam co-star, but we've heard he can be difficult. Did he pay you a common actor's courtesy—showing up to read his lines when he's off camera, so you can react to his delivery?

JORDAN: No. He always sent his double. It made it a little tougher for me, but that's the big time, man. You can do that when you've been a star for 60 or 70 years.

Q6: What made you laugh on the movie set?

JORDAN: Joe Pytka, who directed Space Jam, thinks he's a basketball player. But he can't play. So I played a lot with him and some of the extras. Joe was asking how it really is in the NBA, so I made it physical. Now these extras, they're not just actors, they're basketball players, too, and it got a little rough. Somebody throws an elbow and boom—breaks an extra's nose. I was laughing because it was so timely. That's how it is, Joe.

Q7: Let's talk about trash talk. Is it true that Charles Barkley is the funniest talker and Seattle's Gary Payton is the nastiest?

JORDAN: Charles is funny. He kids me about endorsing everything from cologne to underwear. It's a way to get in your head. But if you know Charles, it doesn't bother you. If you've had success over him, you can throw it right back. You can call him a great second place finisher. Payton is young and brash. He's good. Maybe he talks, but not to me. Still, I could sense the challenge coming off him in the playoffs last year. It's fun when you feel that challenge from a younger player. You have to respond. This is somebody who wants to gain the respect you already have. And maybe he will. It's just that you don't want it to happen this year. That's one of the things that keeps me going.

Q8: How much do you talk on the court?

JORDAN: I am constantly trying to get an edge. There are a lot of mental challenges. Maybe a guy expects me to drive, but I pull up for a jump shot. I might say, g' "This could go on all night." Or tell him he can't guard me. I might ask him a question. "How many do you want me to score?"

Q9: How does it feel when you're airborne?

JORDAN: It's an act of creativity. You make it up as it goes along. I see things before they happen, things that might

His Most Supreme Air-
ness discusses team
hygiene, trash talk and
having Bill Murray as a
golf coach

BY KEVIN COOK



happen, and then alter them—adjust, dish off. It all seems very slow to me, but it might not to you.

Q10: Why are NBA players such sharp dressers?

JORDAN: There are probably more sweaters and jeans in baseball. In a basketball locker room the guys are putting on suits. There's more style, more trendsetting. Here's my theory. It's because people see us wearing shorts all the time. We're so visible on the basketball court, running around in our shorts, that we want to compensate when the game's over.

Q11: Three years ago you quit hoops to try baseball, a more contemplative game. How did you kill all the downtime?

JORDAN: You'll do anything to bide time while waiting for your turn in the batting cage, waiting out a rain delay or riding in the bus. I learned to play hearts, and I also played checkers and dominoes. I filled a book of crosswords. And I listened to some funny arguments. The guys on my minor-league team, most were 21 or younger, and they'd go on about TV shows. Not about whether the show was good. They'd argue about what time it was on. g"lt's on at seven!" "No, 7,30!" I was thinking, Man, this makes me feel old.

Q12: What else about joining the Birmingham Barons was tough on the world's greatest athlete?

JORDAN: Hitting. It's hard. And then I'd see some of those kids staying out till three or four in the morning, drinking beer like water, and the next day they'd go four for five.

Q13: Did you chew tobacco?

JORDAN: Not this time. I tried it back in high school baseball peer pressure—and got a little sick. So in the minor leagues I stuck to sunflower seeds. I'd spit them all over the dugout, practicing my accuracy. We played basketball that way, spitting seeds at a Gatorade cup. I got better at it, but not to a professional level.

I still think baseball is the greatest fun, the best camaraderie you can have. When a basketball game is over, it's zip-zip, 12 guys out the door in different directions. The camaraderie in baseball, at least in the minors, was unbelievable—10 or 12 players hanging out together every night. I still keep in touch with some of those guys.

Q14: Every minor-league ballplayer knows how to rewire a motel TV to steal premium cable. Did you?

JORDAN: No, I can afford to pay. But nobody else was ordering movies; they were saving their money. That's why my room was the team theater. All the guys came in to watch the movie with me.

Q15: What's your dream foursome for golf?

JORDAN: Can I say five? Tiger Woods, Arnold Palmer, Davis Love III, Ben Hogan and me. We play skins, and nobody wins a skin unless he knocks a hole in one.

Here's a real group. me, Larry Bird and Bill Murray. We've played a few times. Talk about talk. Bill is a player, a commentator and a damn coach all at once. It's just like Caddyshack. He'll be teeing off and giving the play-by-play on what club he's using, what kind of shot he wants to play. He does it while you're playing, too.

Q16: Can you be psyched out on the course?

JORDAN: Sometimes. There's a lot of reverse psychology on a golf course. My short game is probably the best part of my game, but I'll hit the tee ball anywhere. So mostly the attacks come when I'm teeing off. A guy will drop a tidbit. g"Michael, there's water on the right. Make sure you go left." It's that simple—golf is such a mental game that you can't block it out. I'll be trying to focus on a good swing, but if you have to think about focusing, your concentration's not there, is it? Golf does that to you. Think about the negative and you're in trouble. You're in the water.

Q17: Why do white guys look so bad with shaved heads?

JORDAN: [Laughing] I guess it has to do with tanning. They've never tanned that part of their damn bodies, so the head stands out a little.

Q18: When you were 15, you got cut from your high school basketball team. What do you remember about that moment?

JORDAN: Looking at the list on the bulletin board, I looked through it four or five times. My name wasn't there. I went immediately to question the coach. I thought he was wrong. But it didn't help. Years later, I thought about that when I saw my name in the newspaper. It was when the Bulls won the first championship. Everyone said an NBA scoring champion couldn't win the NBA title, but I'd just done it. There it was in the paper. So I proved everyone wrong. That's one of my strong points.

Q19: Fifteen years ago this spring, as a freshman at North Carolina, you won the NCAA tourney with a last-second jumper from the corner. Did you know it was going in?

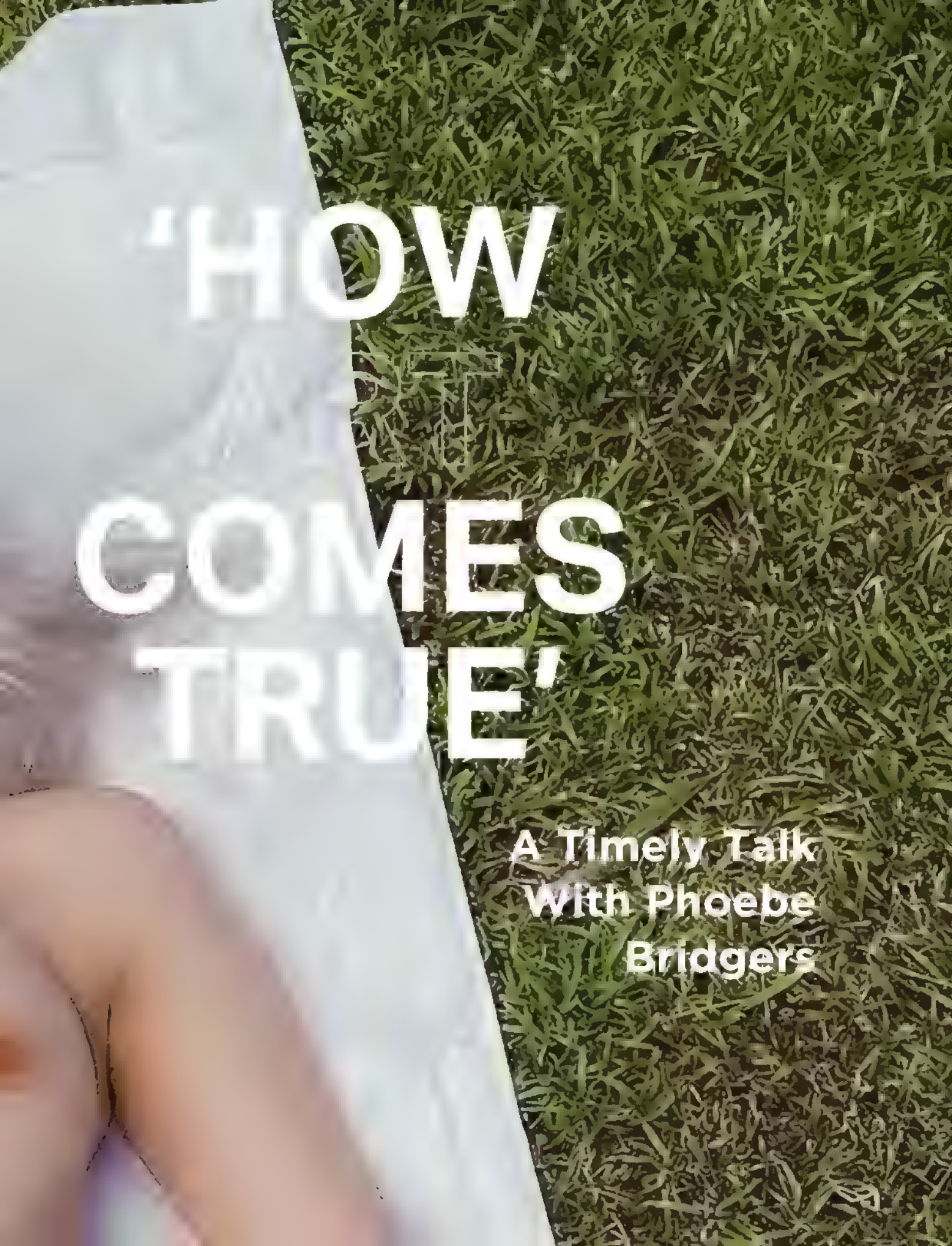
JORDAN: It felt good, but I was fading away, the defense was coming. I never saw it go in. I knew from the crowd, hearing the crowd noise. That was the beginning of Michael Jordan.

Q20: Was Shaquille O'Neal joking when he told us that you really can fly?

JORDAN: People can fly. Some fly higher than others, that's all.





A photograph of a person lying on a green lawn, covered by a white sheet. The person's head and one arm are visible. The background is a dense field of green grass.

'HOW IT COMES TRUE'

A Timely Talk
With Phoebe
Bridgers

The bio that accompanies *Punisher*, the new album by Phoebe Bridgers, contains no backstory, no direct references to the artist's work, no case for why you should buy or stream it. It's a two-page work of fiction set in a haunted house, which makes sense considering it was written by Carmen Maria Machado, whose books *In*

Punisher, Bridgers's eerily prophetic new album, came out last week but feels like it was written within the past month. So does its "bio," written by *In the Dream House* author Carmen Maria Machado. Read on as the two artists conjure their ghosts

INTRODUCTION BY JAMES RICKMAN

the Dream House and *Her Body and Other Parties* use odd formal constraints (one story consists of 272 imagined scenes from *Law & Order: SVU*) to take on the elusive, and often violent nature of desire.

Titled "Yesterday, Tomorrow" and set in a small domicile called the House of Punishment, the bio makes actual biographical exposition feel lazy, but here goes: Phoebe Bridgers is a Los Angeles-bred 25-year-old whose first album, 2017's *Stranger in the Alps*, established her as an artist whose lyrics deserve comparison with the greats of the past six decades. (The list of famous Bridgers admirers and collaborators is impressive but much less interesting than her own story.) Led by the single "Garden Song," *Punisher* takes the folkie backbone of her early work and ups the stakes. The production is bigger and more eclectic, and the words build toward an apocalypse crowded with friends, ghosts, aliens and MAGA bros. The album closer, "I Know the End," is breathtaking—literally, judging by the isolated gasps in its last few seconds.

In early June, Playboy got Bridgers and Machado on the phone to talk about

the bio and the album that inspired it—and Bridgers's remotely directed, camgirl-inspired PLAYBOY shoot. Along the way they got into spirituality, art as prophecy, J.K. Rowling and, of course, the year's overlapping crises.

PLAYBOY: "Yesterday, Tomorrow" is partly based on a conversation the two of you had in March, when the world was a very different place. What's it like reading it now?

BRIDGERS: It was funny, because we didn't have a direction; it was just like, let's see what happens. I was not trapped in my house when we had that interview, and now I'm trapped in my house, and everyone's like, g"Well, clearly your record is about quarantine." So that's been wild. When I first read [the bio] I was like, "Wow, this is a beautiful piece of writing." One of my best friends was like, "If I knew that Phoebe Bridgers fan fiction was a job, I would have quit my day job years ago." And then upon reading it again in the context of right now, I'm just like, "What the fuck? What the fuck?" I'm trapped here. This is the House of Punishment. It's crazy.

MACHADO: I keep getting asked about my story g"Inventory" from my first book, because it's about a pandemic. People are like, "How did you know?" Other writers who have written about pandemics are getting questions like that too. And I'm always like, "Well, if you're a person who pays attention and you're interested in certain themes, it makes sense that prosciense is a normal thing in art."

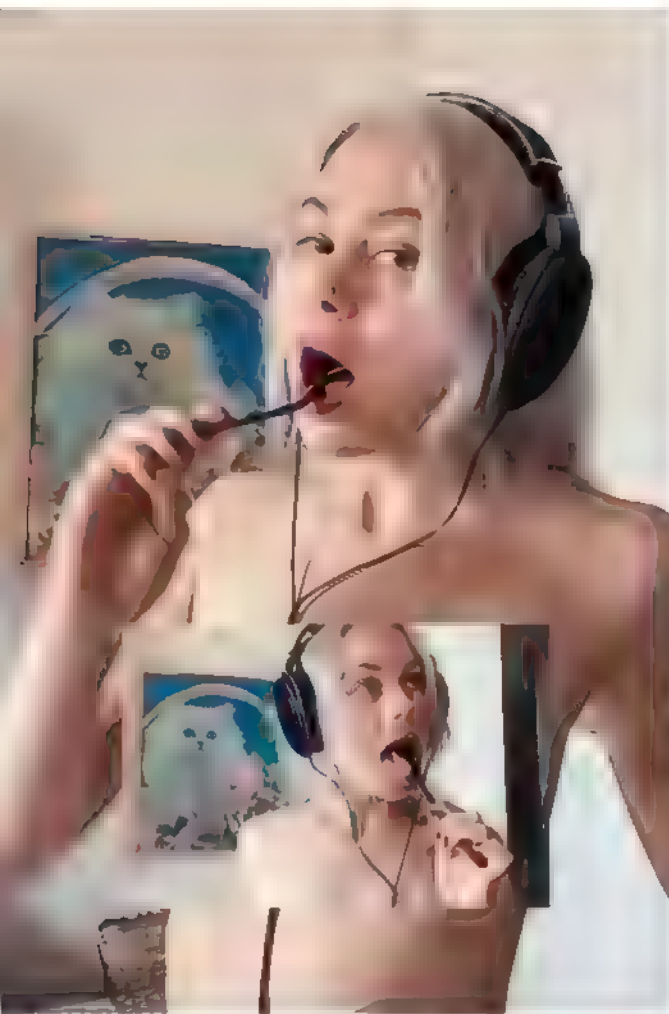
BRIDGERS: Definitely. Weirdly, some of the record is about how art comes true.

MACHADO: I feel like we covered this when we were having our talk for the bio. I was talking about tarot and how I don't believe in predicting the future in a magical sense, but that tarot is the way of mapping your subconscious.

BRIDGERS: This is my favorite intersection of science and magic: looking at a bunch of tarot cards and being like, g"Of course my life is going to fall apart in two weeks," when it's actually just your subconscious that knows it to be true. I think so much science aligns with that at a certain point. I dated this kid in high school who would end up going to MIT on a full-ride scholarship for math. We had lunch when he was in grad school and he was like, m"Well, basically what we're working on right now is time travel." And I'm like, "Oh, there is just a point where math and science just become magic." The more you find out, the more mystical it is, and I think that's what's so fun.

PLAYBOY: Both of you tend to put a lot of ghosts in your work. Do you believe in them?

BRIDGERS: I feel like I'm too excited by ghosts to believe in ghosts. I want supernatural stuff to happen to me so bad that it just doesn't. Like the minute I stop giving a shit, something will float through the wall, and I'll be like, g"Oh, yeah, it's a ghost." That's my dream.



MACHADO: I don't believe in ghosts, but I would give my left arm to just be like, all right, ghosts are real, magic is possible, cryptoids exist. I would love to be in that world.

PLAYBOY: How does mainstream spirituality make its way into your work?

MACHADO: I was raised in the Methodist church, which is a super mainstream middle-of-the-road denomination that is probably about to schism over the issue of gay marriage. But while I was in high school, I fell in with a gang of evangelicals because I wanted to feel something, and I felt like the evangelicals really felt something super strongly. But I also remember thinking, "Okay, if you believe in God and angels and demons, I guess then you believe that all this other crazy supernatural shit in the Bible is real." I don't know. I was a teenager, and I really wanted to feel something—as an adult, I figured out ways to do that without religion or magic—but I feel like that is a symptom of a desire for a kind of magic.

BRIDGERS: I actually have a song on my record about that. I was not really raised religious. I think my mom tried for like two seconds, but it was just not happening. The closest I ever got was crying on my 11th birthday when I didn't get a Hogwarts letter.

MACHADO: Oh, yeah?

BRIDGERS: Even though I was so doubtful—even Santa Claus, since the beginning of time, I've been like, g"No way"—I just wanted someone to prove to me that there was an out; I wanted to believe something. I was so jealous of religious people because it was like, you go to sleep every night thinking, "There is an unseen force taking care of me," and I've never really felt that. I would probably, in the Matrix, take the religion pill if it meant I could sleep easy. So I have a song called "Chinese Satellite," and the metaphor is that you're looking at the sky, and there aren't even stars, and you're like, "All right, I'll settle for this giant piece of hardware in the sky." It's always felt like that's my relationship to religion. I'm going to try this because it's not really working with other stuff.



*My most literal lyrics
sometimes sound like my
spookiest. My imagination
is not as creative as
my reality.*



*energy but is a little
separated from the artist.*

PLAYBOY: Love and romance can be hard to locate on the album. There's that moment in "Garden Song" that also appears in the bio: "And when I find you / You touch my leg, and I insist / But I wake up before we do it." How do they fit into the House of Punishment?

BRIDGERS: I think love has really been a changing form for me in my adulthood. There isn't as much of a script for friendship, so I think the lines kind of blur on the record between romance and platonic friendship. They're kind of becoming the same thing to me. Sometimes I'll be like, "I'm going to write a song about my friend," and then I end up with this very obvious Starbucks love song.

MACHADO: [laughs] Sorry, a Starbucks love song?

BRIDGERS: I don't know, like a Jason Mraz song. My corniest songs that are the least fraught are about my friends. Actually, this is a conundrum too: My most literal lyrics sometimes sound like my spookiest. In "Garden Song," the line "The doctor put her hands over my liver and told me my resentment is getting smaller"—that was a nutritionist in Los Angeles who literally did that to me. My imagination is not as creative as my reality.

PLAYBOY: The bio contains some portentous lines toward the end: "Everyone knows the world is ending. They've been told as much, and they can see it in the streets, and they know the world is irreparably fucked, but most importantly they feel it among themselves; they know this goodness cannot last forever." Do you think that passage speaks at all

to the events of the past two weeks?

MACHADO: I mean, it's sort of what I was saying before about prescience. I think that anyone looking at the world with any kind of self-awareness and empathy can see that a lot of systems are fundamentally broken. If you don't think that, you are extremely lucky and very privileged and I'm not really interested in what you have to say. But the different ways it's broken are going to be more or less obvious to different people depending on what you're talking about. Right now we're experiencing a very concentrated conversation around race and policing and then larger conversations about race, the way that we had a conversation about Me Too two years ago, where gender was at the center of things. Whether or not you think that they will make a long-term difference is anyone's guess. I am a little pessimistic, but also I feel like on this particular issue of how black folks are able to live in our society, it's not really up to me to say if I feel pessimistic or optimistic. All I can do is hope things get better and do what I can with the talents and abilities that I have. But I feel like people have different levels of optimism or pessimism around things like racism or sexism or homophobia or transphobia, and right now we're getting it from all sides. Speaking of getting your Hogwarts letter—

BRIDGERS: Oh my God.

MACHADO: I could go on and on about J.K. Rowling in particular. But what's weirdly illustrative about her is that

she's obviously a super privileged and fucked-up person and is wearing that in a lot of ways, but it doesn't, I think, diminish what her art has meant for a lot of people. Other writers have publicly shown themselves to be bigots, and that can be true even while their art means something to lots of people. It illustrates the many ways in which art has its own life or energy but is a little separated from the artist. If you create a thing, until it's out you can fuck with it as much as you want. Phoebe, you know this.

BRIDGERS: Yeah.

MACHADO: But at some point it's out, and then you can't fix it. You can't change it. It is. It's like a separate thing from you, and it has nothing to do with you anymore; it has to do with all the people who are having conversations with it now and for all of human history, until we destroy ourselves. But also it's sort of beautiful because it's not really about you anymore. And I feel like that's actually useful for artists, because it allows you to move on and do other things. But I think it's also useful for readers or listeners who can say, "This means something to me, and that has nothing to do with J.K. Rowling as a person," or any particular artist as a person or a human being in all their fucked-up ways. It just gets to be its own thing.

BRIDGERS: I think there are certain people whose identities are so wrapped up in being the underdog, like J.K. Rowling. Like, "I'm a woman and I've been belittled for my ideas, I was rejected from each publishing house and my success is this big victory against all odds," but somewhere there's a black woman trying to do that who we never heard from. And the idea that J.K. Rowling is more privileged than other people is clearly so uncomfortable for her and feels like an attack. I think a lot of artists are like, g"Wait, wait, wait, I didn't have a lot. I fought the power too! It was hard for me, too!" And it's like, "Yeah, but your skin color was never a part of it. Your gender identity was never a part of it." When equality feels like an attack, it's just so wild. All you have to do is step the fuck back. It's so hard for people to just shut up and realize it's not their time.

PLAYBOY: Have you guys been marching or otherwise participating in the protests?

BRIDGERS: I've been marching, which was so weird. I don't judge anybody for avoiding marches because of quarantine, because it's kind of impossible: Everybody's wearing masks, but with the police presence there looming and being fucking terrifying, it's like everybody's even closer together than they would be if it was just a peaceful protest, without police. L.A. is its own brand of fucked. The LAPD has such a bloody history that I only really knew half of before going to marches. And then going and hearing like 10 different moms tell their stories about their kids being killed in ways that were not filmed, I had a very predictable reaction: g"Oh my God, I knew it was happening, but I didn't know it was happening." So it felt good to kind of open my eyes to the way that every single community is affected in the same way by a broken system.

It's super weird making music that has nothing to do with race relations or what's going on in the country and using it as a tool, but I feel so lucky to be able to do it; I feel uniquely qualified to open some people's eyes. I'll post "Black Lives



Matter" and get someone being like, p"Hey, watch your mouth," or, "Your cop fans are sad right now." And I'm like, "Fuck you. Quit your job." Like, I'm sorry if I don't make music for you. It's just so weird that my perspective is radical to some people. It's tempting to think, "Oh, I'm preaching to the choir; nobody who listens to my music disagrees with me politically." And then I realized that's not true. I said, "Fuck Donald Trump" in Salt Lake City once and got total silence—at my own sold-out show. I'm like, "Do you guys not pay attention? 'Fuck Donald Trump' is the least radical thing I've said, ever." So I think people are realizing how many people with enormous blind spots exist right now. It feels like even the little that I'm doing is doing something, because those people are kind of everywhere.

PLAYBOY: Last question: Phoebe, have you told Carmen about the Women of 7-Eleven shoot you originally had in mind for this story?

BRIDGERS: I hadn't. It's so epic. It's basically an advertisement for how normal people can be hot. It's actual people who work at 7-Eleven, these cute girls behind the counter—and then naked photos in trucker hats and stuff. It's truly beautiful and inspiring. And I really wanted to do it, but then they were like, g"7-Eleven might not be down with that anymore."

PLAYBOY: The story is actually that they stopped stocking the magazine, so the pictorial was Playboy's fuck-you to 7-Eleven.

BRIDGERS: Well, fuck 7-Eleven then.

MACHADO: That is really smart.

BRIDGERS: But where we landed is camming, which is close to my heart. As a millennial, it's kind of ingrained. And with the quarantine, you have to give yourself specific guidelines. I think we're going to get creative with our restrictions, which is going to be fun.



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Kate Black

Instagram [@iamkateblackx](#)

Photographer [Glenn Wallace | @creative_instincts](#)

PR [House of Paradise | @houseofparadisellc](#)

Location [South Africa](#)











Congratulations on your Playboy feature! How do you feel? I've always loved Playboy there's something so iconic and glamorous about the women who've graced its pages. They own their bodies, their femininity, their sexuality it's about sexual liberation and freedom of expression, and I've always admired that energy. This cover is definitely going up on my wall right next to my Harvard degree. I'm not sure what I'm more proud of though.

What is your best physical feature? Hmm... my brain, obviously. Although technically, that's not a physical feature unless we count all the brainpower it takes to run my life (which I do). But if we're talking body? It's got to be my curves. I love clothes that show them off there's just something about embracing your femininity which I love.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you? Probably I don't experience primary sexual attraction. I'm what's called a demisexual. I've genuinely never looked at someone and thought, "I need to have you right now." It takes months for me to feel that way, because I need actual depth deeper than the ocean, in fact. For me, sex is an exchange of energy, so unless there's an emotional bond, it just doesn't happen. Most of my adult life has been spent in long-term relationships. I love being in love, and I love being in a relationship. But I've realized that I probably should experience life as a single woman, so I'm giving myself a whole year of it (until 2026). And since I don't do casual I'm either all in, or I'm not in at all. I'm actually celibate right now. Shocking, I know, considering all the 'thirst traps' I post online... but honestly, I like to think of my Instagram as not just a thirst trap but a historical record of how hot I was in my 30s. Oh, and I'm also a bit of a sapiosexual so you could be a 10/10 on looks, but if someone else can outdo you in math, well... I'll probably be more interested in them.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? Honestly, I see myself living in California somewhere like Silicon Valley because I'm obsessed with technology and the future. I'd love to do an MBA at Stanford and join a tech startup something fun and a bit crazy. I'm just obsessed with California in general where else in the world can you ski in the mountains and surf at the beach on the same day? It's such a vibe. That lifestyle is all about making waves and moving mountains every single day, and I love that. By then, I hope

my LA-based swimwear brand has grown into something really exciting. I see myself living in some super futuristic house, cruising around in a self-driving car, and probably spending half my time in some virtual world. And who knows? Maybe I'll have kids by then with some crazy tech guy. I'm definitely all for having kids later in life. I want them to grow up in the future when life feels like a sci-fi movie. I honestly think I was born 10 years too early. I just think I'm meant to be a California girl like the Katy Perry song. And I love the USA in general the energy, the lifestyle, the opportunities. It's all just some. Outside of modeling, what are some of your passions or projects you're currently working on? Well, I have a bikini brand called L.A. Rush. It's a Los Angeles-based sustainable bikini brand our fabric is made from regenerated nylon (basically trash pulled out of our oceans). I have always loved being in the ocean, and I'm a scuba diver. After seeing firsthand how polluted our oceans are, I figured why not turn ocean waste into something hot? Right now, I'm focused on creating timeless, well-fitted styles because trends come and go, but a bikini that fits you perfectly? That's forever. I am all about promoting confidence and want women to feel their absolute best when in a bikini. I'm also playing with unsize fabrics because one size should fit all, right? And I've been experimenting with tiny bikinis lately... you know, because less fabric = more sustainable, right? Jokes aside, being naked is probably the most sustainable option (like the cover of this magazine). However, wearing L.A. Rush is the next best sustainable choice.

Who inspires you the most, either in modeling or in life in general? Elon Musk. Just love that some crazy guy from South Africa is trying to colonize Mars and make humans a multi-planetary species. He's such a visionary. And let's not forget Tesla is accelerating the transition to sustainable energy by building a complete ecosystem of electric vehicles, energy storage, and renewable energy solutions. He's basically trying to save the planet and leave it at the same time. As you can probably tell, I'm really into sustainability. Honestly, he can send me if he likes men have always told me I live on another planet anyway. I wouldn't describe myself as down to Earth... I like to say I'm down to Mars. Which is kind of ironic, considering I was once Miss Earth England.

What message do you hope to send to women who see your feature? When I was 21, I probably looked the best I ever had in

my life. I had youth on my side, glowing skin, not a wrinkle in sight, and yet, I was so incredibly insecure. I was literally representing England at Miss Global, standing alongside some of the most beautiful women in the world, and I still felt like an imposter. I didn't embrace the moment, I ruined my own experience by getting in my own head. Now, at 30, I look back with so much disappointment. For me, confidence came with age you just give fewer f***s as you get older. Today, you can literally wake up and choose to be your most confident self, or not, and let your insecurities ruin it for you. Was I probably more beautiful at 21 than I am now? Maybe. But the confidence I carry now makes all the difference. So don't wait. You're not getting any younger, and you'll look back at yourself in years to come thinking, "What the hell was wrong with me?!"

How do you define confidence and sensuality in your own terms? Confidence is just knowing who you are and not being afraid to show it. Sensuality, for me, is about embracing your femininity your curves, your energy, and the way you move. I think it's really important as a woman to not shy away from your softness or your body, but to lean into it. There's nothing more powerful than a woman who's totally at ease with herself.

What has been the biggest lesson you've learned since entering the modeling industry? The biggest lesson I've learned is that people will always try to put you in a box. They'll see you as one thing, and the minute you show a different side whether it's intelligence, ambition, or a completely unexpected layer they won't know how to handle it. People don't like what they can't categorize, and they won't take you seriously if you don't fit into the idea they've created about you. I recently read Me Robbins' book, and it really hit home that you can't control what other people think. If someone has a perception of you, just let them. Don't waste your energy trying to control how everyone sees you, because you'll never win that game. People will judge you no matter what, so you might as well do exactly what you want. That's how I see it: stop worrying about what people think, just let them. If they don't take you seriously because you're multidimensional, that's on them. I'm not here to fit into a mold; I'm here to break it.

Do you like taking vacations? Where is your favorite place you have been and where would you like to visit next? I love traveling. I shot these images in South Af



rica, and it honestly felt like I was in *The Lion King*. The landscapes, the wildlife, the atmosphere, it was unreal. I'm inspired by the world. I love seeing how different people live, learning about new cultures, and exploring places that feel completely different from home. I've been to over 50 countries so far, but I want to visit every single one. Next, I'd love to explore more of the Middle East. I'm fascinated by their culture, their traditions, and their way of life. There's so much to experience. And it's also my dream to visit Antarctica and go on a cruise through Drake's Passage—the roughest water in the world. It's going to be a wild ride, and I'll be there with a margarita in hand, just living my best life.

Besides modeling, what keeps you busy? Like I've mentioned, I have my bikini brand L.A. Rush, and I'm also starting a second business right now—a matcha company called Mad Matcha (because I'm absolutely mad about matcha). I've always loved matcha—the Japanese green tea—and I gave up coffee years ago and switched. It's been such a game-changer for me. I have ADHD, and mine is so severe I sometimes think I've got AD4K! Matcha has been a lifesaver for me. It contains a compound called L-theanine, which helps with focus and staying calm, so it's amazing for anyone with ADHD. It's also helped clear my skin and lower my cortisol levels

unlike coffee, which just sends you into a spiral of stress. I'm really passionate about wellness, so I'm excited to build something around that.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Probably ChatGPT because it's basically my therapist and life coach, and most importantly (feeds my delusions haha). Who needs Wilson when you've got AI that can help you build a raft and manifest your dream life?

What's next for you any goals, projects, or dreams you're excited about? Right now, I'm living in the UK after moving back from America last year, but I really want to experience life in a different country again. I'm thinking of moving to Dubai because it's so futuristic and cutting-edge. It's a city where drones deliver your food, AI runs the metro, and you can literally order an ice bath for your house. It just feels like it's 10 years ahead of everywhere else, and I love that. It feels like the right energy for my next chapter.

What advice would you give to aspiring models? I started in the beauty pageant world. I was Miss Global England, Miss Supranational England, and Miss Earth England. I competed so many times to reach my goals, and I heard a lot of "no's" along

the way. Not winning the crown was a no. I also placed 1st runner-up several times, which was tough, but I always reminded myself: different judges, different days, different results. That's the best advice I can give—just keep going. Modeling is so subjective, and you can't let rejection stop you. When your time has come, it's come. What's meant for you will never miss you. So trust the process and believe in yourself.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words for our readers and where can they find you?

You can find me on Instagram just search Kate Black. My username is iamkateblackx. You'll find the historical record I spoke about earlier there. And if you don't fancy being naked (yet) but still want to do your bit for the planet, you can shop my brand at larushswim.com. Like I said, it's the second-best option after going naked. Oh, and if you fancy trying that green drink your friends say tastes like grass, you can shop at madmatcha.co.uk.

And unfortunately for you all, I'm not on OnlyFans. I've never been much of a fan of ventilation systems. I don't need to do all that work to be hot and raise temperatures... thermodynamics is fun like that. And my last words? "Don't take life too seriously—none of us are getting out alive anyway."





Dear PLAYBOY ADVISOR

Can You Help Me Revive My Sex Life?



Ashley Manta, a.k.a. the CannaSexual, offers her broad-spectrum expertise on cannabis in the bedroom—from strains to suppositories

BY ASHLEY MANTA

Q. I'm a 34-year-old woman and I've been with my boyfriend for three years. When we moved in together last year, our sex life started to feel routine. We're both using the same moves we've used since the beginning of our relationship. They sort of work, but I find myself getting bored. When I try to tell him this, he gets defensive and makes it seem like I'm saying he's a bad lover. I'm not! I've seen articles about couples using weed to connect more honestly and make sex feel better, but every time I walk into a dispensary I'm overwhelmed by the selection. Plus, asking the person behind the counter about my sex life feels like TMI. Can you help me?—B.A.,

A. Most couples struggle with this at one point or another, especially when they've been together for a while. We live in a culture in which most, if not all, of our sexual knowledge comes from trial and error. We go by past experience and what we see modeled in porn and popular media. Adults often operate under the misguided belief that they should just know how to have sex. The reality is, it's not that simple. Even past experience gets you only so far, because each new partner is different and people's needs and responses change over time! This is why it's so important for partners to be able to talk to each other openly and to give and receive feedback without taking it as criticism.

So before we talk about cannabis and sex, it's vital that we talk cannabis and communication. When it's used mindfully, cannabis can be helpful for these sorts of conversations. Don't just get stoned and try to have a difficult conversation; set a time to talk, and give yourselves at least an hour so you're not rushed. If you're a current cannabis consumer, pick a product or strain that helps put you in a calm and grounded headspace. Use just enough to make you feel present and open.

Start with what I call "setting the listening". Open the conversation by sharing your intention ("I want us to have more pleasurable

sex together, and I have some ideas I'd like to discuss with you") and then share any fears that might be standing in the way of a productive discussion ("I'm afraid you'll hear this as criticism, when the truth is I think you're a talented lover and I want us to work together to co-create awesome sexy times"). You've heard it a million times, but it's worth restating. Use "I statements" to share your experience in a way that will be less likely to trigger defensiveness. It may also help to go in prepared with some suggestions for improvement rather than simply lamenting that things aren't where you want them to be.

Ask your boyfriend what he wishes could be different in your sexual escapades. Maybe he's been longing for more dirty talk or something to spice up your hand-job techniques. You can also talk more broadly about the way you approach sex. Is it often the same routine of kissing, groping, oral, then penetration till someone comes, then sleep? Try shaking things up by having a date night when you just make out or just masturbate in front of the other, or have an "anything but the genitals" rule where you can touch every part of the body except what's between your legs. Try dressing up in sexy outfits or pretending you're strangers who met at a club. Think outside the box. Cannabis can help loosen your inhibitions and allow you to access the parts of yourself you may be too shy to share with your partner. It may feel awkward at first, and that's okay! Embrace it. Call it out. You're on the same team, this is all about finding mutual wins.

As for finding the right product, I understand your reluctance to ask budtenders for advice. Honestly, though they can tell you the benefits of particular products the store carries, they're likely not able to give specific recommendations for sex, because desire and arousal are so subjective. It helps to go in knowing how you want to feel—more energized, less stressed, more relaxed, etc—and ask for recommendations based on that. Avoid using *indica sativa* as a predictor of effects. Those designations have become conversational shorthand but aren't actually

reliable, because people vary so much in body chemistry and tolerance, not to mention mindset and setting. Broadly, I can tell you that inhalation methods (smoking, vaping) are better for quick-acting results; topicals (massage balms, creams, bath products and genital-focused intimacy oils) are best if you don't want to feel intoxicated, and edibles are best left to more experienced consumers due to their high variability and length of onset time (it can take up to two hours for edibles to reach maximum effects). Hope this helps!

Q. I struggle to orgasm with a partner. What would be your advice for me or my partner? Can cannabis help with this?—H.R.,

A. We talked about the necessity of communication, and the ways cannabis can support it, in response to the previous question, now let's get down to the nitty-gritty. If you struggle to orgasm during penetrative intercourse with your partner, you have many options. Cannabis topical oils can be applied externally to the vulva: the clitoris, inner labia and vaginal opening. Let it marinate for around 20 minutes and note if your sensations are heightened. Remember that oil and latex are not compatible, so if you'll be using oil products during sex, make sure to choose oil-friendly barriers. Also, remember that most people with vulvas need clitoral stimulation to orgasm, so don't be afraid to pull out a toy or use your fingers during or after penetration. You can also choose positions that are better for clitoral stimulation—for instance, lying on top of your partner (like cowgirl but flat) and grinding your clitoris against their pelvis as you rock back and forth. The internal clitoral structure is much larger than the little button you see on the outside. (Check out this diagram of the clitoral complex.) This means you get to experiment with this newfound knowledge of your anatomy and try to find different ways to stimulate all the parts of your clitoris. You and your partner can work cooperatively to explore this uncharted territory together.

Cannabis can help loosen your inhibitions and allow you to access the parts of yourself you may be too shy to share with your partner.

Q. My girlfriend and I have a lot of fun during sex, but she tells me that every time we do it I'm hurting her with my penis. How can I fix this?—R.S.,

A. This is such an important question; thank you for caring enough to ask! Consensual pain during sex can be awesome, but when a partner is experiencing pain during penetration, that's cause for concern. Different factors can contribute, including (but not limited to) insufficient lubrication, not enough warm-up, cervical soreness, STI complications, pelvic-floor tension or spasm and involuntary contraction due to psychological factors such as trauma. I encourage anyone experiencing pain with penetration to see a health care professional to rule out physical causes.

Cannabis is an excellent pain reliever, so one way to reduce discomfort during sex is to use a THC- and/or CBD-infused suppository. It's inserted vaginally about 30 to 60 minutes before foreplay begins, and it helps reduce discomfort and inflammation. Another product has become incredibly popular among folks who experience pain with deep penetration: Ohnut. This wearable accessory goes around the shaft of the penis and creates a bumper that prevents it from going past a certain point. This is great for people who have sensitivities but enjoy vigorous penetration or deep insertion through doggy style and similar positions.

Finally, I cannot overstate the importance of lube. Many mistakenly believe that lube is only for older adults, or that if a person is turned on they should be sufficiently wet without the need for synthetic lube. According to sex educator Emily Nagoski the

truth is that most people with vulvas get wet when aroused about 10 percent of the time. That means the rest of the time they could be incredibly turned on but not very wet at all. When it comes to pain, lube reduces the likelihood of micro tears in the vaginal tissue, which can be painful and increase the likelihood of STI transmission. In short, lube is probably good for everyone. As famed pleasure pioneer Betty Dodson likes to say, "You should never touch a pussy with a dry hand." Or a dry toy. Or a dry penis. You get the idea.

Q. Are there sex toys that can make me orgasm without losing my virginity? I'm 23 years old, and because of my personal beliefs I want to be a virgin when I marry, but I also want to enjoy my body. Can you help?—S.C.,

A. I'm so happy to hear that you want to enjoy your body and experience orgasm. I can tell that your personal beliefs are important to you, and I want to honor them while correcting some misinformation you may have received over time. First and most important, virginity is a social construct. If you line up five adults and ask them to define the loss of virginity, you'll receive five different answers. Some will say vaginal penetration with a penis, some will say any sexual contact including masturbation, some will say penetration with any object, some will focus on "popping the cherry" or perforating the hymen. Quick anatomy lesson: The hymen does not seal the vaginal opening. It's a donut shape, with a hole in the middle. When the hymen is stretched, it can cause bleeding, but independent of penetration, the

hymen can also be worn away from engaging in activities such as horseback riding or biking. The "hymen checks" you hear about some doctors performing at the behest of controlling parents are not a reliable indicator of anything.

What all this means in regard to your question is that you can use fingers, dildos, vibrators, plugs or any other pleasure-inducing toy to enjoy your body without impacting "virginity," since only you can truly decide what constitutes virginity. If you choose not to include toys of that nature, you still have plenty of external-stimulation products to explore.

I fully support setting appropriate boundaries for your comfort and beliefs. Those decisions, whatever the basis, are yours to make and are entirely valid. I simply encourage you to explore your body and your pleasure in ways that feel good for you—and try not to fixate too much on amorphous concepts like virginity.

Q. I smoke almost every day, and I recently got some CBD oil I would like to try. Someone told me that CBD oil reduces the effectiveness of smoking or ingesting THC. Is this accurate?—S.K.,

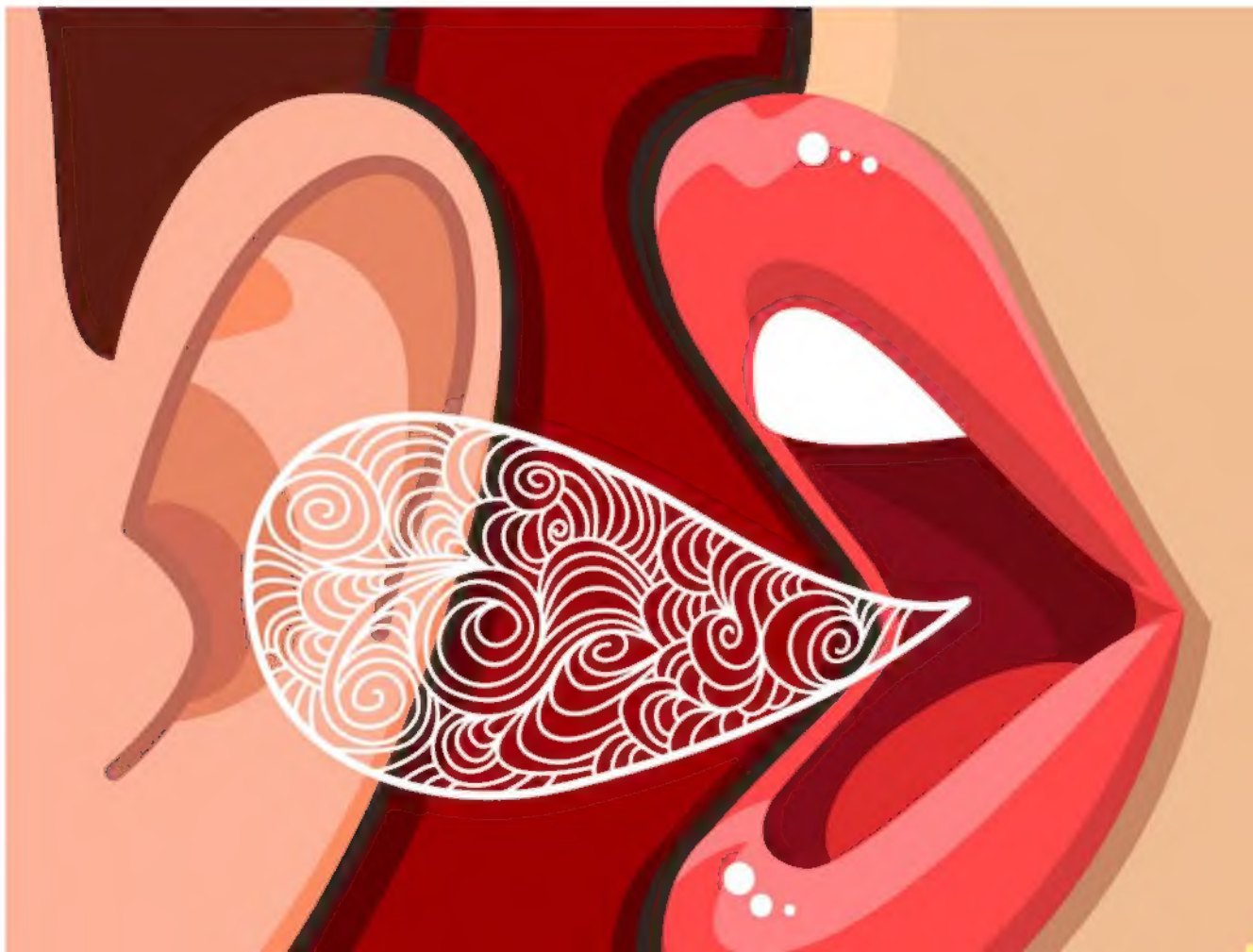
A. This question comes up all the time. There are many misconceptions about THC and CBD, especially with regard to sex. Some say that CBD can counteract the sensation of a too-intense high, but studies have yet to fully confirm this. What is true is that the cannabis plant produces numerous compounds called cannabinoids; THC and CBD are just two of them. These cannabinoids work in concert with each other and interact with the

endocannabinoid system that promotes homeostasis in the body. All cannabinoids are valuable, and they seem, based on preliminary research, to work better together. So to answer your question—no, taking CBD oil will not decrease the effectiveness of smoking THC. If anything, in my opinion, it may give you a more balanced mind-body experience.

I recommend a one-to-one CBD-to-THC ratio for people who are new to combining sex and cannabis so you can enjoy the sensation-enhancing benefits of THC without getting too intoxicated. Because hemp-derived CBD still operates in a legal gray area, it's crucial to choose reputable sources for your products. Make sure test results are available that show the products are free of pesticides and solvents, and don't go bargain hunting. If you can buy it at a gas station, it's probably not good quality.

Finally, choose full- or broad-spectrum CBD products over CBD-isolate products. As you just learned, CBD works better in conjunction with other cannabinoids, including THC, so full-spectrum CBD products will include many of those other helpful cannabinoids, including up to 0.3 percent THC—the maximum allowed by law for a cannabis plant to be considered hemp. (Yes, hemp is cannabis; it's just a legal distinction referring to the amount of THC a plant contains.) So go forth and enjoy the ride!

Most people with vulvas get wet when aroused about 10 percent of the time. That means the rest of the time they could be incredibly turned on but not very wet at all.



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